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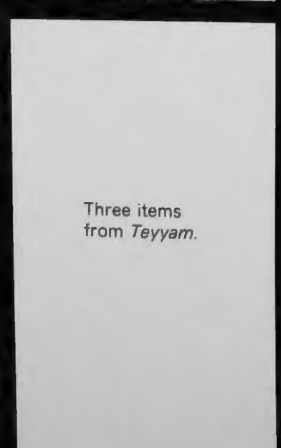
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Three items
from Teyyam.



The contributors to this number include:

J. H. Kwabena Nketia, leading figure of Ghana; composer, scholar and educationist; formerly Director of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.

Manjula Sahdev, Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, author of *Valmiki Ramayana Evam Sanskrit Natak Mein Rama*.

Sitakant Mahapatra, well-known Oriya poet and scholar, and Homi Bhabha Fellow.

H. C. Bhayani, authority on Prakrit and Apabhramsha, formerly Professor of Linguistics, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad.

Sunil Kothari, Head, Department of Dance, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta.

Mohan Nadkarni, music critic.

Kapila Vatsyayan, eminent art historian and writer on Indian dance forms, Vice-Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Peter Cooper, musician, pianist, teacher, author of a work on Nicolas Medtner.

N. Ramanathan, musicologist, Lecturer, Department of Indian Music, University of Madras.

G. H. Tarlekar, musicologist, author of *Studies in the Natyashastra*.

Mukund Goswami, scholar and veena player.

Prabha Atre, noted vocalist, Head of the Department of Music, S.N.D.T. University, Bombay.

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Developing Contemporary Idioms out of Traditional Music*

J. H. Kwabena Nketia

The search for new idioms of music or new ways of making music is one of the major preoccupations of our contemporary world of music, for whether it is Africa or Asia, Latin America or Europe, there seems to be widespread consciousness among musicians of our era that music must reflect the historical experience as well as the intellectual environment of those who make it. For historical and sociological reasons, this search has been much more intense in the western hemisphere and those countries musically within their orbit than elsewhere, and has led to highly technical approaches to music and the creation of equally complex music. Alongside these techniques and technical materials that have issued from them are cultural and aesthetic problems posed by the outcome of this search. These are, to a large extent, equally significant for musicians in the so-called Third World who share a similar contemporary outlook. I propose, therefore, to approach contemporary music as a cultural phenomenon, and to view its creative processes from the standpoint of ethnomusicology, basing some of my reflections on participant-observation of its procedures, while using western composers and critics of their own music as my informants, and their statements as citations of authority.

The Challenge of Tradition

It is generally agreed that contemporary music embodies not just one but a number of trends in music whose common bond is their radical break with some vital aspects of the traditions of the past—a break encouraged by the belief that the contemporary composer must live in his own twentieth century world of ideas and developments in science, and respond, in some measure, to trends in intercultural communication. The emancipation of chromaticism and dissonance in serial composition and the advent of aleatory or chance music, electronic music, the creation of new notations for old instruments, and developments in the use of science and mathematics in composition have been described as marking a new epoch of "revolution, experimentation and exploration" which, according to Alvin Eurich, "reveal that we are living musically not in the 18th or 19th but the 20th century".¹ Nevertheless, while breaking with the past, those involved in this movement see themselves as "projecting the future through music",² thus assuming that the generations that follow them may not go their own way entirely, at least not at the beginning, for such is the nature and force of tradition that present practice that breaks with the past may eventually also establish itself for some time as a tradition.

The particular process in contemporary music to which I wish to address my remarks is the process of developing contemporary idioms out of traditional music or the usages of previous generations of composers and creative performers. For some historians, composers, and critics in the west, such contemporary trends in music have precedents in the past and are, therefore, symptomatic of the attitude of mind that has dominated the western musical scene for centuries.

Nicolas Nabokov observes that, in western music history, "some of the best flowerings have come from the result of a hybridizing process. Mozart and Haydn and so many of our great composers are the result of some sort of syncretism, and themselves very ardent hybridizers".³

Lois Heitor Correa de Azevedo has underscored this fact, noting that "westerners are iconoclasts ready to destroy all that is no longer in fashion, and to burn the bridges which link them to the past. The hero in the history of western music is always he who has defied tradition, who has trodden on the forbidden path. There is lack of purity in western music. It is composite."⁴

Perhaps it is this trend towards iconoclasm that paved the way for the more open-ended approach of contemporary music, for as Aaron Copland also tells us, what he sees of contemporary music "are signs of an extraordinarily free and open—wide open—attitude towards all the many possibilities, including the latest instruments invented by scientists", for he notes that "the present day composer obviously feels that he can write any kind of music in any kind of style that comes to his head. There are no limits any more."⁵

This open-endedness is in sharp contrast to the outlook of the majority of musicians in many parts of the Third World where tradition does not have a pejorative connotation as a limiting factor or as a challenge to originality, but is respected and valued as a necessary stabilising factor and as a fund of well-tried usages that can provide a ready framework for the modes of expression of the creative performer. For it is the usages of the past that provide the moulds for creating and developing channels of communication and musical codes which can be understood by the receptors of music and not just by those who generate them. Accordingly, in such cultures, music has continued to provide what experts in intercultural communication describe as "mutual responsiveness", "congruent functional identities", and "shared focus".⁶

The importance of all these, which has always struck me in Africa, was reinforced for me in India during a concert of Indian classical music featuring a singer at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Bombay. The audience did not just listen. It was evident from the waving of hands and changing body attitudes that they identified themselves with the underlying structure of the music and shared its aesthetic values, and that those who did so were aware of the expectancies in melody and rhythm that provide the common bond for mutual responsiveness and shared focus.

It would seem, therefore, that for the musician who operates in contexts such as the foregoing, the challenge that tradition poses is not the problem of *originality* but that of *authenticity*—in particular how he may respond to and express his creative inclinations and remain at the same time true to the norms of a musical culture by maintaining reasonable margins of the expectancies that musical performance generates.

It must be noted, however, that because of the unprecedented social and cultural change of our era, the general trend towards normative stability is not shared to the same extent by the new generation of musicians brought up

on the music of the west or exposed to it through the processes of acculturation. To them the challenge that tradition poses—which may be positive or negative—is that of *identity*. When it is negative, it leads the musician completely away from tradition. On the other hand, when it is positive, it may generate complete or partial identification with tradition, either as the sole basis of musical activity, or as source material for compositions in a new idiom, an approach also of great interest to some contemporary musicians in the western hemisphere.

The challenge of tradition is thus seen from three different creative perspectives:

1. The perspective of ORIGINALITY (which it might hinder);
2. The perspective of AUTHENTICITY or Normative Stability which it might maintain; and
3. The perspective of IDENTITY, or the characterisation that it might provide.

These three perspectives have in turn led to the development of three sets of compositional techniques for creating contemporary idioms out of traditional music, techniques which may, for convenience of reference, be designated as

1. Reversal Techniques;
2. Syncretic Techniques; and
3. Techniques of Re-interpretation.

Reversal Techniques

The reversal technique consists simply of (a) turning the procedures of tonal music around and using the logic of the reversals as the basis for the major combinations of sounds and rhythm at crucial points of stress or tension; (b) employing techniques for making the regular irregular and vice versa; and (c) generally avoiding procedures or combinations that may suggest unconscious return to tonality or 'root harmony' incompatible with the idiom.

When we were students of Henry Cowell in the 1950s, this was his pedagogic introduction to the basic concepts of early contemporary music practice. Instead of traditional counterpoint, we learnt how to write dissonant counterpoint and gradually acquired a positive attitude to it, though not necessarily a taste for it. We learnt to break away from the logic of tonal harmony, to think atonally, to think in terms of different kinds of clusters and to derive the harmonic logic of any piece of music from the kind of note series it employed as its foundation. We learnt the techniques of other composers who were breaking up conjunct relationships through different concepts of spacing and creating tensions of disjunct relationships, fragmentation, and so on. Indeed we learnt to place much more importance on relationships and functions—which is what one might expect from the author of *New Musical Resources*⁷, a work that encourages the creative utilisation of the relationships in the overtone series in a variety of ways. After these seemingly *tame* studies which emphasised the need for systematic discipline in the reversed systems that evolved, we were ready to be more daring in our

exploration of the world of sounds, including not only emancipated chromaticism and dissonance in the tradition of Schoenberg and his followers but also what Peter Yates describes as random sounds or noise,⁸ always ensuring that there was an underlying logic or a system that was meaningful in terms of relationships, in spite of the apparent chaos we seemed to make of tradition in the view of those who did not share our secrets, namely the critics and the music public.

Although I was fascinated by what we did in respect of the techniques that emerged and the resulting sounds, I knew I was not going to write that variety of dissonant contemporary music when I went back to Ghana; firstly, because I did not think that I had good reasons for joining forces with those who were rebelling against their own tradition out of satiation with the usages of a previous generation. The problem that the contemporary musician in Africa initially faces is not satiation with his own tradition, or for that matter satiation with tonality, but deprivation resulting from colonial education. Hence he must first rediscover his tradition and get to know it really well before he can claim to be satiated to the point of wanting to rebel against its usages. I had not reached that stage. There was so much still to be discovered and learnt from all over Africa.

Secondly, although I was anxious to learn as much as I could of contemporary western compositional techniques as a way of gaining some understanding of this musical culture as an ethnomusicologist and student of composition, I knew I could not really be a part of a western contemporary movement, since my career goal at that critical time when Africa was struggling to liberate itself politically and culturally from colonialism was not to become an African-western composer of a sort who writes music solely for western audiences. I tended to relate to audiences in my own environment no matter what I did with my western experience.

Thirdly, I felt also that I could not apply what I experienced or learnt indiscriminately because some of the procedures of contemporary music conflicted with those of the varieties of African music I knew and would rob them of the basis of their identity or authenticity if applied to them. To impose a western twelve tone system based on the emancipated chromatic scale on the music of societies that use varieties of pentatonic, hexatonic and heptatonic scales might not only cause confusion and bewilderment in those societies, but also suggest a creative version of the 19th century evolutionary stance which dominated the thinking of comparative musicologists. The fact that the emancipated twelve tone scale now has historical validity in terms of the evolution of ideas and techniques in western music does not mean that such a system (and all that it implies) has universal validity, or that it represents the apex of an evolutionary trend in music valid for all cultures. I was positive that there would be no immediate audiences for music based entirely on such a system unless it bore some clear relation to the African experience.

It struck me, nevertheless, that some of the techniques of contemporary music could be used for enhancing or reinforcing structures in new compositions in the African idiom. For example, dissonant clusters could be exploited for simulating African percussion music by means of melodic instruments. Such instruments

could then be developed to function as a supporting rhythm section for another set of melodic instruments that would carry the multi-voiced melodies or thematic structures based on African usages.

Conceptually also the open-endedness of the reversal techniques rather than theories of cultural relativism with which I was familiar forced me to view the usages of African music more positively from a creative perspective that was more adventurous than what I had inherited from the colonial past. This was because the insistence on the exploration of the universe of sounds beyond the limits set by western tonal music indirectly validated for me, in creative and artistic terms, the integrity of the range of divergent usages in African music outside the norms of western scales and tuning systems, concepts of ratio of noise to pitch, harmony, speech-song relationships and shades of vocal intonation in music and so forth, usages which had not only ethnographic interest in terms of societal specialisations in music,⁹ but also creative potential. Just as Debussy's whole tone scale and the usages of composers who wrote in the newly-found "orientale" idiom attested the validity of non-western sound materials not only for western audiences but also for Asian composers with western conservatoire training, so do recent trends in contemporary music and its more open-ended approach to sound affirm or usher in a new basis for the incorporation, accommodation or acceptance of sounds from the world of music, a process that should be continually reinforced by the findings of ethnomusicology when this discipline fully orientates itself also to the interests, needs and problems of the creative musician and those who interpret his music as well as the music public.

Happily our exploration of contemporary music techniques did not stop with the reversal techniques. It crossed over to areas of discovery and validation in the world of music, areas which call for the development of other compositional techniques such as the syncretic technique which, in certain respects, provides a more meaningful alternative for intercultural communication, and the closely related technique of reinterpretation.

The Syncretic Approach

The syncretic alternative involves going to traditional music or music in oral or partly oral tradition for creative ideas, sources of sound, themes and procedures that may be used for expanding one's modes of expression. In the hands of a mature composer, this is not a quest for the exotic, for flavour and nuance, but a search for new musical experiences that stretch the ears of a composer or broaden his imagination and understanding of concepts of music other than what he himself has inherited.

It is significant that some of the great minds of the contemporary musical scene should have turned their attention to the issues involved in the syncretic approach at a time when some of their colleagues thought it would lead to a dead end, since the earlier movement towards national music had exploited this. What impresses me over and above what they actually did with the materials, which was remarkable, is the openness of mind and breadth of vision that enabled the giants among them to see the musical merit and potential of what others despised as simple, underdeveloped in western terms, and limited.

Thus it is illuminating and inspiring that Béla Bartók took time off from performance and composition to collect, analyse and study the traditional music of his country and those of similar societies in Romania, Transylvania, and other countries and to reflect on their creative potential and artistic merit. Commenting on Hungarian folk songs in the introduction to his collection, he observes:

"In their small way, they are as perfect as the grandest masterpieces of musical art. They are indeed classical models of the way in which a musical idea can be expressed in all its freshness and shapeliness—in short, in the very best possible way, in the briefest possible form with the simplest of means."¹⁰

It is similarly illuminating that for a number of reasons Zoltán Kodály insisted (at any rate that is what he told me) that a certain number of Hungarian folk songs be learnt by students of the Liszt Academy of Music in order that they may be a part of their musical vocabulary and musical thinking, for as Stewart Wilson, at one time President of the International Music Council, also remarked:

"Folk music is not an embryonic art. It exemplifies the principles of great art and a basis of taste is, therefore, cultivated by its practice."¹¹

Henry Cowell states the matter differently—from the point of view of a composer interested in developing contemporary idioms of music out of traditional materials. He observes that music has always seemed to him "a single world-wide art because its basic elements are basic everywhere. They have simply been given different degrees of development and different combinations and relationships for identical musical elements in different parts of the world."¹² For this reason he believed that the musical cultures of the world form a part of the musical heritage of the contemporary musician and should be accessible to him. He, therefore, collaborated with Folkways Corporation in publishing his series of selections of "Music of the World's People."

The recognition that these composers gave to the intrinsic value of traditional music (which made them think that others should have access to it) did not prevent them from approaching it on another level as composers who might create their own contemporary idioms of rhythmic and melodic patterns out of such materials which, they believed, should also be enjoyed on their own merit.

Amu of Ghana, who discovered the traditional music of his own people in the late 1920s and created his own compositional idiom out of it to serve the needs of the church and new choral groups in his country, had the same attitude. He distinguished sharply between his own works which were syncretic, and traditional music which he admired and for which he did not consider his music a substitute. When he met me—I was then a young student interested in composition—he advised me to do exactly what he did before he started composing in his own idiom: to go to the traditional people and acquire a repertoire of traditional songs and poetry. Coming from a rural background, I already had a

repertoire, but I took his advice and began serious collections of traditional songs in 1942-43. The texts of over a hundred of these were published in 1949 by the Oxford University Press because I was anxious that my fellow musicians interested in composing songs should have access to texts from which they could learn something of the fundamentals of prosody in Ghana languages. This is because an important factor that gives African music its primary identity lies in the specific types of rhythmic organisation developed by African societies and which are derived to a large extent from the prosody used in African languages. There tends to be a close relationship between speech rhythms and musical rhythms, except that musical rhythms are controlled by a set of timing principles.

There are also specific tonal characteristics of African music which are in part guided by tones and intonational processes, and in part by musical considerations related to pattern and progression. An African composer must, therefore, master the fundamentals of African melody and rhythm so that he can create typical African tunes based on any of the varieties of heptatonic, hexatonic and pentatonic scales used in African societies. When he is able to do this, he need not always borrow tunes from the traditional repertoire, for he can create tunes that would be true to the traditional idiom.

The problem that contemporary African composers have had to face is how to deal with such materials within the framework of multi-level or multi-voiced music, for there are precedents in traditional African music for the use of this kind of framework. For example, the music of an African drum ensemble is conceived as multi-level music of a specific kind involving the use of polyrhythms within a spatial framework of tones. Such an ensemble may be combined with melodic instruments such as flutes, or a chorus of voices. In some traditions, choruses sing in unison or parallel octaves, while in others they sing in parallel thirds or fourths, depending on the scale type. There are complex forms of these in the instrumental and vocal music of some African societies—for example, in Chopi xylophone music which is conceived for large ensembles in which the instruments are grouped into four or five graded parts with a supporting rhythm section. Ekonda vocal music is equally complex, involving the use of antiphony in which each set sings in two or three parts in thirds or overlapping thirds, and may overlap in some sections of the piece. The peculiar polyphony used by Bushmen and Pygmy societies in Africa has similarly been noted.¹³

The problem in Africa, however, is that due to the colonial music education which introduced musicians to western music and western harmony rather than the multi-level music of Africa which was unknown to the educators, composers have tended to look more to the west for techniques of multi-voiced music which is much more sophisticated than our own forms of multi-part organisation. Instead of the traditional forms of choral organisation, composers are attracted to the western type in which voices are separated into parts on the basis of register or range—the S.A.T.B. type of choral music, suggesting the adaptation of western harmonic usage in new African choral music.

Syncretism has, therefore, meant the combination of African melodic and rhythmic techniques with adaptations of western harmony—usually tonal harmony—and, in the case of large works, the use of western developmental

Since the creative challenge of this approach lies in re-ordering and using procedures and resources of traditional music without imposing an external framework or idioms from other musical cultures on it, it holds promise for those who feel that the possibilities within the music of Africa, for example, with its very rich diversity of tonal materials and modes of rhythmic expression, need to be explored for creating masterpieces of African music. For if, as Bartók has suggested, traditional musical items are "in their small way as perfect as the grandest masterpieces of musical art", then we must explore the techniques that can take compositions based on these to the level of masterpieces on their own terms. There are indications that some musicians like Akin Euba¹⁷ feel this way, for experiments in musical drama have already led him to this—to the need for developing new art music based on the creative potential of African music, a point of view shared by other artists who have attempted to bring traditional musicians together in new ensembles that perform essentially traditional repertoire.

Some Practical Issues

A number of practical issues arise from the foregoing discussion. The first is that in dealing with contemporary music in the Third World, one is not dealing with just techniques, problems of musical grammar, aesthetics and so forth, but also with a complex of problems emanating from music and social change. One is dealing with some two hundred years of active culture contact involving periods of colonialism and transculturation—the transplanting of foreign institutions, foreign languages, foreign culture across the globe. What we find all over the world, therefore, of the western presence is a fact of history and social evolution resulting in a variety of responses and reactions to the pressures and challenges of our time, shaped in part by the past of each society and in part by interaction on different cultural, social, political and economic levels characteristic of our contemporary world. We are dealing with syncretic music that is an aspect of the way of life of sections of Third World populations that have undergone acculturation. What is needed first and foremost is a deeper knowledge of traditional music that will enable contemporary composers of the Third World to create masterpieces which can stand on their own, as they shift the traditional approach which resulted in a 'masterpiece' by a creative performer to the masterpiece created by an imaginative composer and subsequently interpreted by performers.

The second issue, which is closely related to the foregoing, concerns the education and training of the contemporary composer. Since contemporary music practice encourages creative search for sounds and sound combinations not only in one's cultural environment but also cross-culturally, there is much to be said for training programmes that combine music theory and composition with ethnomusicology, programmes that view music theory cross-culturally, and which give the composer opportunities of exposure to a wide variety of techniques and procedures in different cultures. As Henry Cowell puts it:

"Today the aspiring composer must analyse carefully for himself several of the musical styles that appeal especially to him, whether they be Asian or American or African or European—old or new, traditional or experimental. If he does this he will come to understand the principles of modal melody that offer

such immense numbers of attractive possibilities for tonal music, and he will learn how a tonal melody has been defined and enlarged, and how its own fitting counter-point has been derived from it. By enquiring into more than one traditional culture, he may discover fresh techniques for using rhythm. India, Africa, Persia Indonesia—all have wonderfully imaginative different concepts for the rhythmic organisation of music, both for monodic and multilinear music."¹⁸

The third issue concerns the achievement of a distinctive cultural focus and individuality in contemporary compositions in spite of the broad base of the training and exposure suggested above. Here we have to bear in mind that music is a cultural phenomenon and that every culture has specific areas of structural focus. Whatever the contemporary western composer does with his new sound palette, with materials and ideas borrowed from other cultures or with real time, he seeks in the end the multi-level music characteristic of his culture even though the relationships in the music may be utterly different from those of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Techniques of inversion and diminution, symmetry and asymmetry, motivic development or thematic interplay, considerations of texture and the use of large forms as well as approaches to instrumental ensembles or the orchestra show greater historical continuity than one might suppose. Arnold Schoenberg was broadminded enough at some point in his career to suggest that his techniques were not intended to exclude all other possibilities and those of the past. He writes:

"We prefer to use consonances less, which is possibly only a reaction against the preceding epochs of consonance—perhaps an exaggeration. But to draw from this the conclusion that consonances are forbidden, because they no longer appear in the work of this or that composer, would lead to errors like our predecessors' rule against direct fifths."¹⁹

In searching for new directions in the music of the Third World, it would be equally important for each culture to keep the areas of focus that give its music its identity clearly in view. To destroy this in the course of searching for wider perspectives would be like annihilating the foundations of one's musical culture and the basis of shared experience.

The fourth and last issue is the need for maintaining a close relationship between musicians and their music public. I have the impression that western composers are pushed to the extreme by the concept of 'art for art's sake', a position that cannot be assumed so readily in the Third World if it means sacrificing the humane qualities at the root of our musical cultures for art that is technically brilliant but leaves everyone bewildered. It is indeed easy for composers involved in what Alvin Eurich describes as "a revolution, experimentation and exploration" which reveal that "we are living musically not in the past but in the twentieth century" to become enthralled with what they are doing and forget that music must communicate.

In drawing attention to this problem, I do so in full awareness of the fact that innovation in music will always have its supporters as well as adverse critics, as Joseph Machlis subtly demonstrates through quotations from statements made by Boethius (c. 480-524), Jacob of Liege (c. 1425), G.M. Artusi (c. 1600), August von Kotzebue (1806), all of whom deplored the innovations in the new music of their time, and Henry Pleasants who in his *Agony of Modern Music* (1955) states that "what we know as modern music is noise made by deluded speculators picking through the slaggpile."²⁰

Reviewing the matter in a recent article entitled "On the Unpopularity of New Music", Rankovic makes the following observation:

"Although new music has undoubtedly enriched the world of music with new sound and new techniques, it seems that this development has not been parallel to a development of man's capacity to experience music. . . . The programmatic humanity of the new music which burdens the auditive perception of the listener with the aggressiveness and intensity of its sounds which are abstract, schematised or chaotic or governed by chance, has not succeeded in attracting wide audiences or creating the habit of listening to it. Even young listeners with a musical education mostly cannot love this music, although they can respect it. This music cannot be loved. It actually does not even want to be loved. As Adorno remarked, it is the reflection of a broken and empty world. Such a reflection cannot be loved because it reproduces the same emptiness in the spirit of the listener."²¹

In support of his view, Rankovic maintains that the attribute *new* has been maintained in defence of this music for too long a time and that the expectation that certain types of new music might cross over to the side of general acceptance by the concert-going public as happened in the past might remain unfulfilled for a much longer time because of in-built problems for the human receptor.

There is no doubt that arguments can be produced to prove the contrary, at least from the experience of those who implemented the Contemporary Music Project of the Music Educators National Conference of the United States, or the experience of the International Rostrum of Composers organized by the International Music Council for UNESCO in co-operation with the European Broadcasting Union. For those of us in the Third World, the lesson is clear. Consideration of the problem of communication and education of the music public must go hand in hand with the outcome of the search for contemporary idioms of music. Otherwise we may end up not only having critics within and outside our borders who may hurl unkind words like banal, low, bastardised, hybridised at our effort in complete ignorance of the social evolution that conditions the present state of any art, but also audiences who may react to our music in the manner described by Alvin Eurich, audiences who might just dash out of the concert hall with their hands over their ears shouting, "What is that terrible nonsense?"²² We should certainly seek new directions that can

make the new music being created really exciting. At the same time we should not be too eager to sacrifice the humane values of music for abstractions that do not generate mutual responsiveness, congruent functional identities and shared focus on which both intracultural and intercultural communication so much depends.

* * *

Notes

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11. Stewart Wilson : 'The Role of Folk Music in Education', *Music in Education*, p. 49, Paris, UNESCO, 1956.
12. Henry Cowell : 'The Composer's World' in William Kay Archer (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 99-113.
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14. Henry Cowell : 'The Composer's World' in William Kay Archer (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 102.
15. Peter Crossley-Holland : In Jacob Needleman ed. *Speaking of My Life: The Art of Living in the Cultural Revolution*, p. 88, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1979.
16. See William W. Austin : *Music in the Twentieth Century: From Debussy through Stravinsky*, p. 226, New York, W. W. Norton, 1966.
17. See Akin Euba : 'The Potential of Traditional Music as a Contemporary Art' Ibadan, *Black Orpheus*, Vol. III, No. 1 Jan-June 1974, pp. 54-60.
18. Henry Cowell : 'The Composer's World' in William Kay Archer (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 108.
19. See William W. Austin : *op. cit.*, p. 203.
20. Joseph Machlis : *Introduction to Contemporary Music*, p. 1, New York, W. W. Norton, 1979.
21. M. Rankovic : 'On the Unpopularity of New Music', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. X, No. 2, 1979, p. 205.
22. Alvin Eurich : *op. cit.*

* * *

*This paper was presented at a symposium on 'Contemporary Music and the Third World' held during the International Music Congress organised by the Hungarian National Music Committee for the International Music Council (UNESCO) in Budapest from October 2 to 5, 1981. The general theme of the Congress which followed the 19th General Assembly of the International Music Council was: THE COMPOSER IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY—IN COMMEMORATION OF THE 100th ANNIVERSARY OF BÉLA BARTÓK.

The Portrayal of Rama in Sanskrit Plays

Manjula Sahdev

Ramakatha (Ramayana), composed by Rishi Valmiki, occupies an important place in India's literature, culture and civilization. It has always been considered the first poem (*Adi Kavya*) of Sanskrit literature. Poets, through the following centuries, have written on this *Ramakatha*, and its influence can be assessed by the wealth of literature devoted to it.

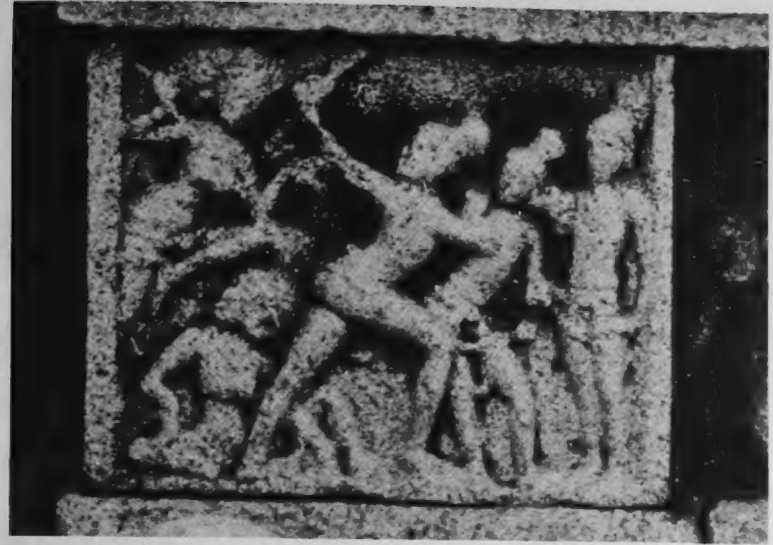
The study of *Valmiki Ramayana*, in its present form, suggests that it was not the poet's intention to portray his hero, Rama, as a superhuman being or a god. There Rama has been depicted with a few human weaknesses as well. Even so, Valmiki's Rama is no ordinary mortal. Poets after Valmiki transformed the *Ramakatha*, made changes in the character of Rama, presenting Rama's image more as that of a god or a god-oriented individual than a human being. It is difficult to encompass all the changes made by the later poets in one article.* But the pattern of the transformation is evident if we select just three episodes for discussion: *Tataka-Vadha*; *The Purification of Ahalya* and *Vali-Vadha*.

Tataka-Vadha (The Killing of Tataka)

In Valmiki's time, when women enjoyed respect in society, even a glance at another's wife was considered improper (*V.R.K.* 33.39). Physical punishment was reserved for women guilty of anti-social behaviour, but they were not killed. According to the poet, for a man to murder a woman was indeed a sinful and shameful act (*V.R.U.* 81.22). But in the case of the female-demon Tataka, we encounter a different situation.

Vishvamitra is taking Rama and Lakshmana with him to Siddhashrama. He needs them for the successful accomplishment of his *yajna* (sacrifice). On the way, they stop at Tatakavana, where Vishvamitra describes the havoc wrought on the forest by the demoness Tataka. He uses all his powers of persuasion to convince Rama to kill Tataka. But Rama does not show any zeal for performing this act. Then Vishvamitra cites the examples of Indra and Vishnu who, in the interests of the defenceless, killed women and punished them for their crimes (*V.R.B.* 19.4-6; 24.28-31; 25.15-22). His words have their effect on Rama who immediately agrees to kill Tataka (*V.R.B.* 26.4).

Rama takes his bow and twangs it so that all the four cardinal points echo with the sound. Hearing this noise, the enraged Tataka appears before Rama. When he sees her, Rama says to Lakshmana, "Look at this fearful *Yakshini* of formidable size. I shall now cut off her ears and nose and put her to flight. I do not have the heart to slay her because women deserve protection. I shall incapacitate her by depriving her of the power of movement" (*V.R.B.* 26.12). In the meanwhile, the dreadful Tataka comes tearing down towards Rama with uplifted arms. She raises a thick cloud of dust, and for a while the two brothers can see nothing at all. She causes a shower of rocks to rain on them. Rama, filled with wrath and parrying the rain of stones, cuts off both her hands. Then Lakshmana cuts off her ears and nose (*V.R.B.* 26.15-18).



Tataka-vadha, Brahmapurishvara Temple, Pullumangai, near Tanjavur, circa tenth century A. D.

Tataka invokes her magical powers and assumes various forms. From her hiding place she flings heavy rocks on them. Vishvamitra advises Rama to kill Tataka at once because she does not deserve any mercy. He adds that it is now evening and at night it is difficult to overcome demons. Rama then surrounds Tataka with arrows. Encompassed by his darts, she comes roaring towards both the brothers, when Rama, with a single shaft, pierces the heart of the *Yakshini* (*V.R.B.* 26.19-26).

These references in the *Valmiki Ramayana* clearly indicate that Rama was far from willing to kill Tataka. In every kind of situation he tries to punish her and force her to retreat, thus preventing her from causing any harm to the *yajna* of the *rishi*-s. The question of killing her arises only when Rama's own life and safety is at stake. So he kills her in self-defence. According to Valmiki, every man has the full right to save his life (*V.R.U.* 9.14).

Some scholars believe that Rama killed Tataka in the interests of society (for example, Shanti Kumar Nanurama Vyasa in *Valmiki Kalina Samaja Evam Sanskriti*). It is true that in the beginning Rama promised Vishvamitra that he would definitely kill Tataka in order to safeguard cows, Brahmanas and for the sake of the welfare of society. But when he encountered Tataka, his only thought was of punishing her. He even forgot his earlier promise to his Guru. Had Rama decided to kill her, he would have not given her a single chance to fight him. He would have meted out to her the same treatment that he gave to the demons,

Maricha and Subahu. Where they were concerned, he aimed his arrows at them without the slightest hesitation, as soon as he set his eyes on them. The above reference clearly indicate that Rama slew Tataka in self-defence.

The writers of the Sanskrit Rama plays have, each in his own way, justified Rama's conduct during this episode in his life. Some of the dramatists, for instance Bhasa in *Yajnaphala* (4th-5th century B.C.); Hanumana in *Hanumannataka*, *Mahanataka* (7th-12th century A.D.); Jayadeva in *Prasannaraghava* (12th century A.D.); Ramabhadradikshita in *Janaki-raghava* (17th century A.D.); Subrahmanya in *Sitavijayaindiraparinaya* (17th century A.D.); Vishvanatha in *Ananda-raghunandana* (18th century A.D.); Venkaya in *Sitakalyanavithi* (18th century A.D.); Ramapanivada in *Sitaraghava* (18th century A.D.); Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri in *Abhinavaraghava* (19th century A.D.); Narayana Shastri in *Maithiliyam* (20th century A.D.); Gopalarya in *Prataparaghava* (N.R.D.) and Venkateshasudhi *Amogharaghava-prekshanaka* (N.R.D.) have simply mentioned this incident as a link in the story and to demonstrate the strength and valour of Rama even in his youth. In these plays, Rama killed Tataka with a single shaft and there is no description of a fight.

Some of the dramatists have, however, devoted serious attention to this event. They have depicted the confusion and conflicts in Rama's mind. In the *Mahaviracharita* of Bhavabhuti (7th century A.D.), there is a moment when Vishvamitra asks Rama to kill Tataka and Rama promptly replies, "She is a woman." Kushadhvaja, the younger brother of King Janaka, appreciates Rama's feelings. Vishvamitra, in the interests of the safety of Brahmanas, encourages Rama to perform this act and Rama, setting his doubts aside, follows the advice of his Guru (Act I). In *Uttararamacharita*, however, Bhavabhuti refers to this episode (Act V, 34-35). Here Rama's son, Lava, remarking on the 'bravery' of Rama, says that even though Rama slaughtered Tataka, the wife of Sunda, his glory remains undiminished and he is revered as one of the illustrious ones of this world. This suggests that Bhavabhuti could not ignore or gloss over this act of even such a great and god-like individual as Rama.

In *Anargharaghava* of Murari (8th-9th century A.D.), Rama kills Tataka simply because he decides to obey the order of his Guru Vishvamitra. But after the killing, he is overwhelmed by sadness. He tries to justify his act, offering various explanations. Firstly, he reasons that murdering a woman is not a sin if it is carried out on the orders of a Guru. Secondly, he argues, "We are here today. Tomorrow we will be somewhere else. In the meanwhile we can overcome the shame by closing our eyes." But these justifications bring no peace to his mind. The act of killing a woman disturbs his feelings again and again. He says, "O! This deed of mine does not please me. When people learn of what I have done, my family Guru, Vasishtha, will be filled with shame." In fact, Rama feels so guilty that he does not face Vishvamitra (Act II, *Shloka* 59-60).

Shaktibhadra, in his drama *Ashcharyachudamani* (9th century A.D.), through the words of Ravana (5.18), and Rajashekhara, in his work *Balaramayana* (9th-10th century A.D.), through those of Sihanada, the son of Ravana, (Act VII), criticised the character of Rama on this very score. In both these works the deed is described as a blot on the fair name of Rama. In *Ramarajyabhisheka* of Viraraghava (19th century A.D.), Rama resists the idea of killing Tataka and says

that he had been ordered to kill male demons and not female ones. He feels that killing a woman, who is all alone in the forest, will smirch the reputation of Manu and Vasishtha. But under pressure from his Guru he carries out the order (Act VII). In *Harshavasana* of Kanailala (20th century A.D.) Rama repents the act of killing Tataka.

There are a few plays which try to justify Rama's act. In *Hanumannataka*, when Ravana blames Rama for the murder of Tataka, Angada says, "The characters of great men are worthy of worship, not of criticism" (Act IV, 22). In *Sitavivaha* of Sheshadri (18th century A.D.) it is said that the duty of the *kshatriya* is to kill anti-social individuals, whether male or female.

But Jagguvakulabhushana in his *Manjulamanjira* (19th century A.D.) has transformed the whole event to depict the character of Rama in a good light. Here Lakshmana asks Rama to shoot arrows at the *bhramara* (bee), which is sitting on a flower of the Ashoka tree on a mountain. Rama does exactly this and the death of Tataka occurs. The black mountain is none else but Tataka. Even here Rama criticises and curses himself for killing a woman but Vishvamitra pacifies him saying that a murder undertaken for the safety of others is not a sin but a good deed (Act II, 5).

A study of these works reveals that dramatists right till the 20th century tried to offer new interpretations of this act but they could not really ignore it. Their explanations varied but the deed had to be mentioned.

Purification of Ahalya

The next episode for consideration is the purification of Ahalya. In the *Valmiki Ramayana*, Rishi Gautama curses his wife Ahalya for her illicit relations with God Indra. The nature and the condition of his curse is: "You shall remain immobile in this place for thousands of years, subsisting on air, doing penance, lying on ashes, invisible to all beings. Such will be your existence in this hermitage. When Rama, the son of Dasharatha, enters this forest, you shall be purified. After you have offered him due hospitality, you will cease to be swayed by passion and in my proximity shall regain your present form" (*V.R.B.* 48.29-32).

Vishvamitra takes Rama and Lakshmana inside the *ashrama*. There they see Ahalya, so dazzling bright on account of her penance that it is difficult to gaze at her. The poet describes her as a divine and illusory image created by Brahma, a flame veiled in smoke, the brightness of the moon obscured by clouds, a reflection of the sun's splendour in water (*V.R.B.* 49.13-15). Both the brothers touch her feet. She, calling to mind the words of Gautama, offers them hospitality and they accept the homage in accord with tradition (*V.R.B.* 49.17-18).

These details show that Ahalya is not a stone but a living being engaged in rigorous penance to purify herself and be freed of the curse of her husband. Even in the *Uttarakanda* of the *Ramayana*, she has been described as a *tapasvini* (*V.R.U.* 30.41-44). Shatananda, the son of Ahalya, says to Vishvamitra, "Have you shown to the princes my revered mother who has for a long time been engaged in rigorous austerities?" (*V.R.U.* B. 51.5). Regarding the invisibility of Ahalya, it is clearly said in the epic that Gautama has strictly ordered her to



Purification of Ahalya, Deogarh Temple, circa sixth century A. D. (now in The National Museum, New Delhi). Photograph: Courtesy, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi.

remain in the *ashrama* and secondly that she appears dazzling bright on account of her austerities and it is impossible to gaze on her.

The poets, after Valmiki, in an attempt to indicate Rama's supernatural power, gave a new turn to this episode. Some of the dramatists, in order to continue the chain of the story, mention that Ahalya was purified by the godly grace of Rama. Several dramatists (Hanuman in *Hanumannataka* (Act III, 19) and *Mahanataka* (Act III, 45); Murari in *Anargharaghava* (Act II, pp. 62-63); Bhagavantaraya in *Raghavabhyudaya* (Act II, 2); Srinivasa in *Sitadivya-charita* (Act III, p. 31); Vishvanatha Singh in *Ananda-raghunandana* (Act I, 86); Narayana

Shastri in *Maithiliyam* (Act II, 7); Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri in *Abhinavaraghava* (Act III, 10); Vedantasuri in *Raghuviracharita* (N.R.D.) (Act II, p. 80); Sheshadri in *Sitavivaha* (N.R.D.) (Act II, p. 89); Bhattasukumara in *Raghuviracharita* (N.R.D.) (Act II, p. 42); Nrisimha in *Yadavaraghaviya* (N.R.D.) (Act I); and Varadakavi in *Janakiraghava* (N.R.D.) (Act I) have all described Ahalya as a stone who resumes the form of a woman with the touch of Rama's feet.

Some plays, like *Janakiparinaya* (Act I), *Ramarajyabhishekha* (Act I) and *Manjulamanjira* (Act II), depict either that Rama, by chance, sits on a stone or that Rama removes a stone from the path. In both these accounts the stone then assumes the form of Ahalya.

There are only two dramas which do not refer to Ahalya as a stone. One of them is *Mahaviracharita* of Bhavabhuti and the other is *Sitaraghava* of Ramapanivada. But both the poets accept the divine influence of Rama on Ahalya.

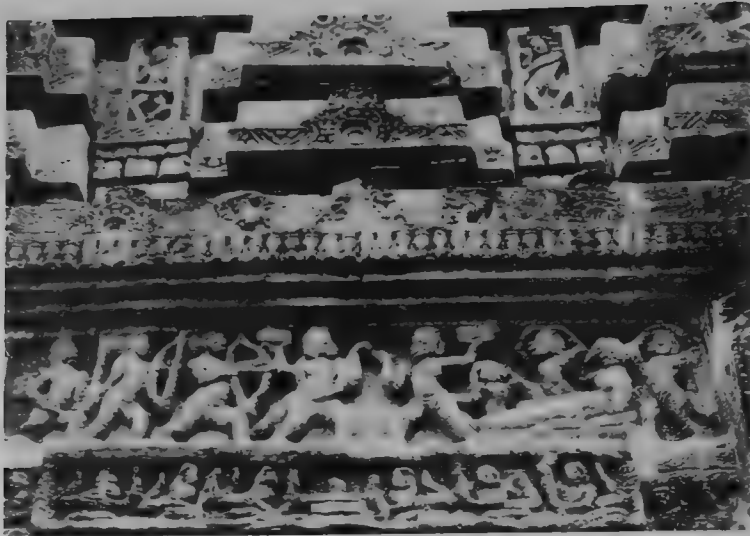
In this way the latter poets depict the personality of Rama not as that of a mortal, but an incarnation of Vishnu.

Vali-vadha (The Murder of Vali)

One of the most controversial episodes in Rama's life is *Vali-vadha*. In dealing with this particular event a few questions naturally arise: (i) Why does Rama choose Sugriva as his ally and not his brave brother Vali? (ii) Why does Rama kill Vali, at a time when he is engaged in fighting another person? (iii) Why does not Rama appear before Vali during the fight? (iv) To what extent can the explanations set forth by Rama before Vali be justified?

In the *Ramayana*, Vali is described as powerful and brave, much more so than Sugriva and Ravana. He could have been more useful to Rama in his search for Sita. As he himself explains to Rama, "Had you asked me for help, I would have brought Sita to you within a day and handed over to you the abductor Ravana" (V.R.K. 17.49-50). Even then Rama does not choose to be friends with him. The reason is clear, Rama himself has no knowledge of Sugriva and Vali. It is the demon Kabandha who tells him about the two brothers and advises him to make an alliance with Sugriva who is faced with a situation similar to the one faced by Rama (V.R.A. 72.23-24). If Kabandha had recommended Vali as an ally, Rama might perhaps have sought his help. Anyway, one cannot be certain whether Vali, a well-established king, could have helped Rama or refused to do so.

The point at issue is: Why did Rama kill Vali when the latter had done him no harm? After making friends with Rama, Sugriva tells him his pathetic story and relates to him the tale of Vali's atrocities. Rama's heart is moved by the suffering of his friend, and his friend's enemy becomes his own enemy (V.R.K. 5.24-30). Sugriva repeatedly appeals to Rama to kill Vali (V.R.K. 8.39; 10.30; 12.11). Rama promises Sugriva that he would kill Vali on that very day (V.R.K. 5.26-28). Again Sugriva reiterates his fears, speaks of his difficulties and Rama repeats his promise to kill Vali (V.R.K. 8.21; 10.32; 14.13-14). But in these details there is no hint of Rama's killing Vali from a hiding place. Moreover, Rama clearly says to Sugriva, "If you do not have faith in my strength and valour, I shall demonstrate them in battle" (V.R.K. 11.83). This is only possible when there is face-to-face



Vali-vadha, Singanatha Temple, near Cuttack, circa ninth century A. D.



Vali vadhā, Shatrughneshvara Temple, Bhubaneswar, circa seventh century A. D.



Vali-vadha, Ghot Manglod Temple, Rajasthan, circa tenth century A. D.

fighting. The question of killing Vali with one shaft arises only when Sugriva, defeated in the first combat by his brother, curses Rama and the latter pacifies him by saying that he will kill Vali with one arrow and promptly he pierces seven *Sala* trees with one arrow (V.R.K. 12.37; 14. 10-11). But even here there is no mention of Rama killing Vali from behind.

Rama, accompanied by Lakshmana and Hanuman, goes to Kishkindha to slay Vali. But he does not walk to the open battlefield; he stands behind a tree (V.R.K. 12.14; 14.1). Shiromani, a commentator on the *Ramayana*, has tried to justify Rama's action: "To avoid the heat of the sun, they stood behind the trees" (V.R.K. 14.1). Even so, there are ample references to prove Rama's absence from the battlefield. On the first occasion Sugriva leaves the field only because he fails to find Rama there (V.R.K. 12.21) and Vali does not see anyone else but Sugriva (V.R.K. 12.22). During the second encounter Vali learns about Rama from his wife Tara. But he does not actually see Rama on the field. This clearly shows that Rama shot his arrow from behind the trees.

It is a matter of great surprise that Rama, who was such a splendid archer, so powerful of body, one who had killed dangerous demons in his youth, killed Vali from a hiding place. Perhaps Rama would not have slain Vali thus had Sugriva not appealed for help, indicating his own critical condition (V.R.K. 16.27, 28.31). Rama was moved by the plight of his friend and shot the arrow without giving thought to the situation. Commentators hold different views on this subject. Govindraja says, "Rama had promised Sugriva to kill Vali, so he adopted this crooked policy *chhadmaniti*. Had he revealed himself to Vali and had Vali surrendered to him, then the promise made by Rama to Sugriva would have remained unfulfilled." (V.R.K. 18.43). Tryambakarayamakhi in his *Dharmakuta* says that Rama

had promised to kill Vali on the very day he sealed his friendship with Sugriva. If he had challenged Vali to a fight and the latter had left, or asked Ravana for help or returned with his army, Rama's promise to Sugriva would have remained unfulfilled. So Rama slew Vali from the hiding place (V.R.K. 18.43).

A study of the *Ramayana* and the commentaries suggests another reason. There is a reference to a golden necklace given by Indra to Vali (V.R.K. 17.5, 22.16). Whenever Vali goes to war, he has the necklace round his neck. Govindaraja says, "Indra gave this golden *mala* to his son Vali to ensure victory. The effect of this *mala* was that whenever anyone came before Vali to engage in a fight, all his strength and power was transferred to Vali. Perhaps Rama was aware of this fact and so he did not face Vali" (V.R.K. 11.30). In the *Ramayana*, Sugriva simply tells Rama about this golden necklace of Vali, but he does not utter a single word about its effect.

To what extent is Rama's justification of his act correct? Vali sharply criticises Rama for his non-*Kshatriya* war policy. In his reply, Rama says, "This earth belongs to the Ikshvakus and the virtuous Bharata is now ruling this earth. We, other princes, carry out his righteous commands and range the whole earth in our desire to promote the law. You have acted in opposition to the spiritual law. You have had marital relations with Ruma who is your sister-in-law. Being a warrior of an illustrious race, I am unable to brook your villainy. A person, who makes his daughter or sister-in-law an object of lust, is punishable by death" (V.R.K. 18.6, 7, 9; 18, 20, 22).

Again Rama says, "People, in the open or concealed, catch innumerable wild beasts with snares, nets and traps. Those who feed on flesh do not pause to consider whether these beasts are fleeing in terror or are unafraid and standing still as they shoot them when their backs are turned on them. I do not believe that they are at fault" (V.R.K. 18.39). "Even royal *rishi*-s, devoted to their duty, go out to hunt. So you are struck by my arrow, whether you enter into combat with me or not, because you are a beast" (V.R.K. 18.39-40).

There is not a single mention in the *Ramayana* that the whole earth belonged to the Ikshvaku dynasty or that Bharata had issued such instructions to Rama. In fact, we find various regions governed by different kings like Kaikeya, Janaka and Vishala. Vali himself tells Rama that he has done no harm to his land, city or to him personally (V.R.K. 17.24).

According to critics like Dr. Benjamin Khan (*The Concept of Dharma in Valmiki Ramayana*) and N. R. Navlakar (*A New Approach to the Ramayana*), Rama's second justification does not hold water. For his relations with Ruma, Vali was treated as a human, a man, and meted out the punishment of death. On the other hand, he was also regarded as a monkey. If Vali and Sugriva are to be regarded as monkeys, the funeral rites of Vali and the installation of Sugriva on the throne of Kishkindha with full Vedic rites cannot be justified.

Valmiki states that a person who is not engaged in a fight should not be killed (V.R.U. 80.39), but we find that this rule is not observed in the case of Vali.

Actually Rama kills Vali only to fulfil the promise made to Sugriva that he would regain for him his wife and kingdom. Rama himself confesses that this is his approach (V.R.K. 18.26-27).

Some of the writers of Sanskrit Rama plays, namely, Jayadeva, Someshvara (13th century A.D.), Rajahchudamani Dikshita, Venkateshvara (17th century A.D.), Srinivasa Subrahmanya, Narayana Shastri Lakshmanasuri (20th century A. D.), Jagguvakulabhushana, Sriranganatha, (N.R.D.) and Nrisimha, have merely mentioned the story of *Vali-vadha*. Shaktibhadra, Rajashekhara and Mahadeva (17th century A. D.) in their respective works *Ashcharyachudamani* (5.18), *Balaramayana* (Act VII) and *Adbhutadarpana* (3.11) have criticised Rama for killing Vali from a hiding place.

Except for the dramatist Bhasa, all the other writers have changed the whole situation to justify the action of Rama. In *Abhishekanataka* of Bhasa, Rama does not agree with the arguments of Vali which seem to be quite fair. In Act One, Rama emphatically says, "You deserve punishment; so has it been given to you."

In *Mahaviracharita* by Bhavabhuti, Malyavan, Ravana's minister, persuades Vali to kill Rama. So Vali engages Rama in combat and is killed by him. But in *Uttaramacharita* (Act V, 34), Lava (Rama's son) says, "Who does not know the exploits and the greatness of the Lord of Raghu's race?" Lava then refers to three actions of Rama (the destruction of Tataka, the wife of Sunda, the fight against the demon Khara, and the killing of Vali) and speaks in a sarcastic vein of those whose glory is undiminished even after such deeds. Obviously the poet could not ignore the manner of Vali's death.

In *Anargharaghava* of Murari, when Vali learns that Rama has thrown the skeleton of the demon Dundumbhi, he is furious. His minister Jambavan persuades him to fight Rama. As a result he is killed by Rama (Act V). In *Hanumannataka*, Vali is annoyed with Rama for piercing the seven *sala* trees and comes out to fight. Here Rama feels sorry that the innocent Vali has been killed (5.50, 54). He says to him, "I shall earn peace and purification of mind only if you kill me when I am asleep." In *Sitanandanataka*, Ravana sends Vali to kill Rama. In *Janakiparinaya*, Vali opposes the friendship of Rama with Sugriva and offers to fight a duel with him (Act VI). In *Raghavabhudaya* of Bhagavantaraya (17th century A.D.), Vali challenges Rama to a combat. The poet has not offered any reasons for this step.

In *Ananda-raghunandana* of Vishvanatha Singh, Vali sends word to Ravana to bring Rama and Lakshmana to him. In the meantime both the brothers (with Sugriva) come to Vali. Vali expresses a desire to fight and his challenge is accepted by Rama (Act IV). In *Raghuviracharita* of Bhattasukumara (N.R.D.), Vali offers to fight and is killed by Rama (Act V).

In *Ramarejyabhisekha*, the poet Viraraghava has given a new turn to the whole situation. Here Vali demonstrates his desire to fight both Sugriva and Rama. Rama asks him, "Against both together or one by one?" Vali replies, "Together, one in front and the other from behind." Rama again asks him, "Who would you wish to be in front and who behind?" Vali prefers Sugriva, being his own blood, to be in front and Rama behind. In this way he is killed by Rama.

In *Ummattaragheva* of Virupaksha (14th century A.D.), Lakshmana kills Vali. In *Abhinavaragheva* of Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri and *Valivijayavyayoga* of Yogananda, Rama does not come into the picture at all. In these two plays, Sugriva himself kills Vali.

While dealing with the portrayal of the character of Rama, mention of *Shambuka-vadha* will not be out of place since, like *Vali-vadha*, the episode is also controversial from the point of view of the depiction of Rama's character. In the *Ramayana*, it is said that the vigorous penances and austerities of the Shudra Shambuka cause the death of a Brahmana boy. Narada advises Rama to prevent Shambuka from conducting these penances. Rama goes in search of Shambuka and when he finds him he does not say anything to him but simply cuts off his head. As soon as the Shudra Shambuka dies, the child regains his life (*V.R.U. Sarga 74, 75, 76*).

Except for Bhavabhūti and Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri, the other poets do not mention this episode. While Sundaraviraraghudmahasuri simply refers to this incident, Bhavabhūti tries to modify its importance. Here, too, Rama slays Shambuka for the sake of the Brahmana child; but before he kills him, he is overcome by pity for the saint, Shambuka, and curses himself. After his destruction at the hands of Rama, Shambuka assumes the form of a holy man. He pays his respects to Rama, who confers blessings upon him and the promise of joy in the next *loka* (2. 10-12).

In this way succeeding poets have tried to justify the acts of Rama by giving new twists and turns to certain events in his life, all the while keeping in view Rama as a god or an incarnation of Vishnu. But they could not overlook certain episodes. In the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, Rama has been described as an half-incarnation of Vishnu-*Vishnorardham Mahabhogam* (*V.R.B. 18.11*), and at certain places his godly grace has been demonstrated. Even so, the very personality of Rama and the qualities of his character (as depicted in the epic) clearly indicate Valmiki's intention to portray Rama as the hero of his epic and not as a god or god-oriented man. In tracing the development of the traits in Rama's personality and the origin and development of the Rama saga, one realises that the maximum changes in the *Ramakatha* as well as in the character of Rama were made around the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. when his image as a god (*avatara*) was fully established.

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*A detailed discussion appears in the author's work *Valmiki Ramayana Evam Sanskrit Natakon Mein Rama*, Vimal Prakashan, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, 1979.

Abbreviations

V.R.A. *Valmiki Ramayana Aranyakanda*

V.R.B. *Valmiki Ramayana Balakanda*

V.R.K. *Valmiki Ramayana Kishkindhakanda*

V.R.U. *Valmiki Ramayana Uttarakanda*

N.R.D. Refers to those manuscripts which offer us no clue to their date and historians of Sanskrit literature have marked them as lost plays. In all such cases, N.R.D. indicates that references to date are not available.

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Poetry as Performance

(The Origin and Development of *Pala* in Orissa)

Sitakant Mahapatra

Pala occupies a very special place in the complex mosaic of Orissa's performing arts. It shares certain elements with the other forms of folk performing arts such as *Jatra*, *Suanga* and *Leela*. Like them *Pala* uses literary themes, stories and anecdotes to entertain spectators. Like these forms, it, too, is a blend of story-telling through *kavya*, music and dramatic performance designed to grip the imagination of the audience. But, in addition, *Pala* is intimately linked, on the one hand, to a form of religious worship and ritual practised in medieval Orissa and, on the other, to the elitist culture of the pundits and scholars well-versed in the Sanskrit tradition of the *Purana*-s and other literary works.



1



2

The worship of *Pancha devata* (the five deities) can be traced to a very old tradition in Orissa. The deities are Ganesha, Vishnu, Durga, Shiva and Bhaskara (the Sun-god). During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at the time of the Bhaumakara, Somavamsi and Ganga dynastic rule in Orissa, the relative importance of Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava cults and forms of worship kept on fluctuating on the basis of royal patronage. The Somavamsis were patrons of Shiva worship and the Bhaumakaras of Shakti worship. While they patronised Vaishnavite worship, the Gangas were not averse to Shaiva or Shakta cults. Later, during the period of the Gangas, to these three was added the worship of Bhaskara and Ganesha. In fact, particular *kshetra*-s or places of worship came to be associated with each of these presiding deities. Bhubaneswar came to be associated with Shiva worship, Jaipur or Birajakshetra with Shakti worship, Puri with Vishnu worship, Konarak with Sun-worship and Maha-binayaka with Ganesha worship. Such was the spirit of religious eclecticism current in the air and encouraged by the royal dynasty

that whenever any one of the five deities was worshipped, the other four were assigned places of honour and were, in fact, ritually invoked to come to the sanctified "ground of worship".

Pala as a performing art emerged from this worship of the five deities. In the early days of *Pala*, there used to be five singers (*Gayaka*-s) who would recite songs, *shloka*-s and *stuti*-s in praise of the five deities. These were taken from ancient or classical Sanskrit texts, *Purana*-s and some contemporaneous writings. The leader among the five gradually came to be known as *Gayaka*, while the other four were designated as *Palia*-s (literally meaning those who join in the refrain). They used to be dressed in the typical Orissi style of the time, which included an Orissi type of *pugree* on the head, a *dhoti* worn in the style of the Oriya Paikas and a long glittering and often colourful gown going down well below the knees. A costly *chadar* covered the neck and the shoulders and earrings, bracelets and armlets were also worn. The costume was thus almost royal in style. They would sing to the accompaniment of *ramtali* (two pieces of symmetrical and decorative wood which strike against each other and produce a rhythmic beat) *mridanga* and cymbals and they wore *nupur*-s round the ankles.



3



It is important to note that, in this traditional pattern, a *Pala* presentation always began with an invocation to and worship of the five deities. On a low wooden table called *asthana* (seat), covered with a coloured piece of cloth, were placed (on betel leaves) five pairs of ripe bananas with the skin peeled off, each pair symbolising one deity. Invocations to each of the deities were recited by the *Gayaka*. The area where the *asthana* was placed was always purified by *Panchamruta*. The recitation was elaborate and ritualistic and the religious litany accompanying it was as important as the singing. The invocations were mostly from

Sanskrit texts including the Vedas and the Upanishads and the singer-priest was expected to have an intimate knowledge of the *shastra*-s.

This ritual worship was followed by the *Pala* proper, namely, the recitation of a story or a theme. Sometimes, when it was not meant as entertainment for an audience, the ritual worship alone could be conducted and the theme-story would be simply recited in the house of the patron by the local priest without the help of any *Palia* or *Palia*-s. In other words, the priest would be the lone *Gayaka* and he would merely recite the *Pala* theme. Such celebrations are conducted for various purposes in Orissa and Bengal even today. In Orissa, sometimes sixteen *Pala*-s are offered to the deities to appease the gods, to ward off some personal tragedy or in fulfilment of a vow. If a sick child lies dying, his mother or grandmother may pledge to have sixteen *Pala*-s or twelve *Pala*-s, spread over as many years as an offering, to ensure that the child is cured by the grace of God. If the wish is fulfilled, *Pala*-s are performed annually for the prescribed number of years on an appointed auspicious day.



There is considerable evidence to show that till about the seventeenth century *Pala* recitation was confined to royal courts as a form of aesthetic literary enjoyment mixed with religious worship or to individual households for the exclusive purpose of religious worship. In the former case, the *Pala Gayaka* or singer exhibited his knowledge of the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Sanskrit classics and the Oriya *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in the presentation of the theme or the story. Generally the story element in a *Pala* recitation was thin and the padding was provided by diversions into ancillary themes, related episodes or literary cross-references. This is the pattern in *Pala* recitation that is followed to this day.

The priest who recited the *Pala* as a form of religious worship in the household of his *jajamana* (patron) was very rarely a scholar. This is why in later centuries, more often than not, he used to recite on the basis of a printed text rather than from memory. His capacity for improvisation and forays into literary cross-references was severely limited. For example, if the recitation included a description of a morning, or a season, or the face of a *nayika*, he never displayed his erudition by introducing material about how such a beautiful face or season had been delineated by Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Magha or even well-known Oriya poets, including the authors of the Oriya *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He generally read out the text from a palm-leaf manuscript. This, too, was called *Pala* to which only relations and friends in the village were invited.

Over the centuries the repertoire of an erudite *Pala Gayaka* kept on expanding. First it was the Vedas and the Upanishads, the religious texts and the *Purana*-s; later, the Sanskrit classics were added; still later, the works of Upendra Bhanja, the master of Oriya *Riti-Kavya*; of Radhanath Ray, the first great poet of the modern age; the works of that great craftsman of language, Gangadhar Meher, or of Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha and other poets both from the medieval and modern poetic tradition. Among the medieval authors particular mention may be made of Balaram Das's *Laxmipurana* and Jasobanta Das's *Govinda Chandra*. Upendra Bhanja's *Vaidehisha Bilasha* and *Subhadra Parinaya* and Gangadhar Meher's *Tapaswini*, *Pranaya Ballari*, *Indumati* and *Kichaka Baddha* were also extremely popular.

Around the seventeenth century the poet Kabi Karna composed a number of *Pala*-s specifically meant for recitation in a religious context. Kabi Karna's life and times have not been discussed fully but it is generally agreed that he lived in the later part of the seventeenth and the early part of eighteenth century. This was a time when politics and society in Orissa and Bengal were undergoing swift changes. The Muslim invasion of Bengal and Orissa prompted some popular authors to compose what they thought was a literature for bringing together the Muslim and Hindu cultures and forms of worship. It was, for example, maintained by some that Satyanarayana, Narayana or Vishnu, the presiding deity of *Pala* as a form of worship, was indistinguishable from Satyapira who was an incarnation, a devout Muslim saint or Fakir. This belief was particularly strong in Bengal where Satyanarayana Panchali came to be identified with *Pala* and also incorporated in it themes relating to the apotheosis of Satyapira. *Panchamruta* was expanded to include *Sirini*, a preparation made out of ripe banana mixed with flour, milk, molasses etc. In 1568 A.D., Orissa came under the Muslim rule of the Goud Sultans. Only certain areas of Puri and the Ganjam districts continued to be inde-

pendent and the King of Orissa. Gajapati Ramachandra Deva, was designated as *Thakur Raja* or the King of the God. Mansingh, the able general of Akbar, attacked Orissa and the Moghul armies established their camps in various parts of what is modern Orissa. It was during these troubled times that Kabi Karna (who seems to have known both the Oriya and Bengali languages equally well) composed his sixteen *Pala*-s. Each of these *Pala*-s describes the *mahima* (power or glory) of Satyapira through a story. For example, in one of these *Pala*-s, Satyapira himself appears in disguise as an old man before a rich merchant and advises him to offer worship to Satyapira. The merchant laughs at the old man and his apotheosis of Satyapira. He earns the wrath of Satyapira and is reduced to beggary. Then he realises his guilt and atones for his sin by arranging the performance of Satyapira *Pala*. He is, thereafter, freed from the consequences of the curse. This is identical with the theme of the *mahima* of Satyanarayana, the incarnation of Vishnu. Even the *Skanda Purana* has four cantos devoted to the worship of Satyanarayana. The stories are supposed to have been narrated by the sage Narada to Shuka and by the latter to sage Shaunaka in the forest of Naimishya. In one of the stories Satyanarayana speaks to an old Brahmin (in Kashipur) about the virtue of worshipping him. The poor Brahmin follows his advice and his poverty vanishes, winning him unasked-for riches. The other chapters similarly delineate themes of good fortune, including the birth of a son to an issueless king worried about the continuity of his dynastic line.

Kabi Karna composed sixteen *Pala*-s. The Orissa State Museum has, however, a total number of twenty-nine *Pala*-s in palm-leaf manuscript. Some of these *Pala*-s are assigned to more than one poet. For example, *Satyanarayana Janma Pala* has three different versions and these are by Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha and Shankara Acharya respectively. Kabi Karna's language is a peculiar mixture of Oriya and Bengali as the following extracts (first in Oriya script, then with a transliteration in Roman script and lastly an English rendering) would indicate.

ଆମି ଦେବି ଦେବେ ଅବତାର ନିରାକାର
ସ୍ୱଗମର୍ତ୍ତ୍ୟ ରାଶିଗଣ କରୁଣୀ ଆମାର ।
କପାଳୀୟ ରୂପ ଆମି ଓଡ଼ିଶାରେ ଆଉ
ହିନ୍ଦୁ ମୁସଲମାନ ସବୁ କରି ଲଗାଇ ।
ରାମ ରହିମାନ କାନ କୋରାନ ରୂପେ
ଦକ୍ଷିଣ କେମାନ ରୂପ ମାନେ କି ନିମାନ ।
ନା ମାନେ ଦାରିଆ ଡ଼ାବ୍ରାହ୍ମେ ରୂପେ
ଭିକ୍ଷେନ ପଦ୍ମାହୁରା ରୂପେ
ପଦ୍ମାହୁରା ରୂପେ ହିନ୍ଦୁ ମୁସଲମାନ ।
ନିକ୍ଷେପ ରୂପେ ନାକାଗଣ ନିକ୍ଷେପ
ପଟିତପାତକ ରୂପେ ପଟିତ ଭକ୍ତ ।
ଶାଗାଗଣ ନିକ୍ଷେପ ନିକ୍ଷେପ ନିକ୍ଷେପ
ନିକ୍ଷେପ ନିକ୍ଷେପ ନିକ୍ଷେପ ନିକ୍ଷେପ

Ami Sâhi devatê nirâkha
nirâkara
Swargamartya rasêtelê karani
amara
Jagannâth rupê âmi Odsâitê era
Hindu Musalmân sabu kari
ekâkara
Rama Rahumana jana Korâna Purañê
Dakshiba kêmâna rupa mâne ki
nâ mane
Dariaitê Dâbrubrahme rupêitê
bhîksena
Padmaphula rupa haiyê
Satyanârâyana
Baudha rupêitê nâchale byekari
Patita pâbena rupê patite
uddhari
Sachi garbhê janamila nadiê
nagara
Sâhi Mahâbâhhu ebê kalitê Fakira

I am that God, unmanifest and without shape
My deeds extend to all the three worlds
In my incarnation as Jagannath in Orissa,
I welded the Hindus and Muslims into one group
Know me as Rama and Rahiman
Described in the Koran and the *Purana*-s.
See my vision and realise me,
Whether you recognise it or not.
In the ocean I floated
As the log of wood in which the Brahman inhered
And I, too, floated as the lotus, the Satyanarayan
As the incarnation of Buddha I appeared at the Blue Mountain
And became the saviour of all the fallen
In the city of Nadia I took birth in Sachî's womb?
And I am the same Lord
Now only a Fakir in this Kaliyuga.

— କବିକର୍ଣ୍ଣ

Some of the contemporaries of Kabi Karna composed in the Oriya language. Among them particular mention should be made of Dwija Bishwanatha, Bhrugurama and Shankara Acharya. Below is a complete list of the twenty-nine *Pala*-s along with the names of the poets to whom each of these is ascribed. When one *Pala* has several identical or near identical versions, all the relevant authors have been mentioned against it.

Name of Pala	Author or Authors
1. <i>Satyanarayana</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha, Shankara Acharya.
2. <i>Abhinna Madan</i>	Kabi Karna.
3. <i>Ugratara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Kashinatha, Shankara Acharya
4. <i>Kathuria</i>	Kabi Karna, Huduram Das.
5. <i>Kishorechandra</i>	Kabi Karna, Kishorechandra Patadeb.
6. <i>Gudiasankar</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha, Jayakrushna.
7. <i>Dashabatar</i>	Kabi Karna.
8. <i>Durjan Rajan</i>	Kabi Karna.
9. <i>Padmalochana</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
10. <i>Bhramarbara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwambhara.
11. <i>Manohar Phasiar</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Kashinatha.
12. <i>Mardagaji Janma</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
13. <i>Mardagaji Bibha</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
14. <i>Rangalata</i>	Kabi Karna.
15. <i>Laxmankumar</i>	Kabi Karna.
16. <i>Ratnakara</i>	Bhrugurama.
17. <i>Sadananda Saudagar</i>	Kabi Karna, Bhrugurama.
18. <i>Bidyadhara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha, Shankara Acharya, Bipra Jagannatha
19. <i>Nilasundara</i>	Kabi Karna.
20. <i>Madansundara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwambhara.
21. <i>Hari Arjuna</i>	Kabi Karna.
22. <i>Swetabasanta</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
23. <i>Herachanda</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
24. <i>Dayananda</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Raghurama.
25. <i>Dwarika</i>	Sitalacharana.
26. <i>Hemaghata</i>	Nityananda.
27. <i>Satyanarayana</i>	Kabi Karna, Shankara Acharya, Kinkar Das, Rameshwara.
28. <i>Vandana</i>	Kabi Karna.
29. <i>Swargarohana</i>	Kabi Karna.

Generally speaking, these *Pala*-s do not exhibit any great imagination in the treatment of the themes. They are mostly stereotyped and repetitive and almost all of them are designed to illustrate the power and glory of either Satyanarayana or Satyapira. They are narrative and descriptive in character and have hardly any use for symbol or metaphor. The language is simple, unvarnished and colloquial. All except the *Vandana Pala* of Kabi Karna have a story to tell. This one has only invocatory lines for Ganesha, Saraswati, Shiva, Durga and a host of gods and goddesses of Orissa inhabiting its different regions. Special mention may also be made of Dwija Kashinatha's *Ugratara Pala* in which each line of all the verses starts with the fifth vowel of the Oriya alphabet.

Pala thus incorporated in its fold an extensive repertoire drawn from Sanskrit plays and classics and also Puranic and contemporary *Kavya* literature. One has to assume that the *Gayaka* was a scholar for he had to remember all the references, improvise and introduce a number of relevant texts to describe scenes, situations, events etc. and establish parallel similes and metaphors through the technique of association.

Over the years *Pala* also incorporated in its fold a vast body of local and rural legends, proverbs and popular sayings. These were no doubt used more by the *Palia*-s as interludes or as a counterpoint to the thread of the recited story of the *Gayaka*. Generally a *Gayaka* has one *Palia*. But occasionally there could be four *Palia*-s, the five together symbolising a representative of each of the five deities.

There has been considerable debate among scholars and historians of literature as to whether *Pala* is folk literature or a folk performing art. In the cultural heritage of Orissa, the folk and classical elements are often combined. Besides there was also an admixture of tribal elements. In the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, for example, one can see elements of all these and it is truly a fine example of a folk-classical-tribal continuum. Secondly, poetry and song were closely linked and quite often poetry, for example, the medieval love lyrics and portions of Upendra Bhanja's *kavya*-s, could be set to music and sung. As a matter of fact, the compositions of Gopalkrushna, Kavisurya and Banamali continue to provide a large part of the repertoire of the music accompanying Odissi dance.

Pala thus incorporated not only a vast body of classical and modern, popular and elitist literature but through its audio-visual presentation helped in their spread and popularisation. The oral tradition of "listening in" to the classics of literature—the Oriya *Bhagabata*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and also other *Purana*-s—was, and continues to be, quite strong. Literature reached the formal illiterates through this process. Being a classical-folk continuum, *Pala* combined the literary contexts, the cognitive elements, the stylisations of important *Kavya*-s, their *alamkara*-s, organisation and other formal qualities with vignettes and sequences from everyday life, including its rural humour, sometimes bordering on crudity and earthy sayings, legends and proverbs.

Pala thus became a unique form of entertainment which held the attention of the rural folk, charmed and entertained them even as it educated them in the basic traditions of both Sanskrit *Kavya* and ancient, medieval and, to an extent, even of modern Oriya poetic creations.

The relationship between the *Gayaka* and the *Palia* helped the combination of folk and elitist traditions. The *Gayaka* and the *Palia* were in a sense in binary opposition:

serious	: non-serious
religious	: profane
Sanskritic	: folk
decorum	: crudity

In certain cases, for example, after the *Gayaka* has completed the recitation of some important Sanskrit *shloka*-s, the *Palia* would humbly beg permission to contradict the interpretation given by the *Gayaka* and give an alternative version of the text. This would no doubt be a distorted meaning but he would make it credible sometimes by the use of a pun or alternative meanings of words. But often he would beg to present a slightly different version. The objective behind such a move would be parody and satire. It is necessary to mention here that *Pala* has demonstrated a great capacity to hold up to ridicule and satirise social evils. The miserly and ignorant king, the *vaidyā*, who knows nothing of diagnosis but is addicted to drink, the mischievous minister with sinister motives, the corrupt official, the pompous pundit showing off his knowledge, tyrant rulers, selfish leaders who hardly care for the people but accumulate fortunes at the cost of ordinary folk—all of them come in for effective, hilarious and trenchant criticism. To cite an example, Pandit Gopabandhu Das has four celebrated lines which are given below in Oriya script, its transliteration in Roman script and its English rendering:

ମିଶୁ ମୋର ଦେହ ଏ ଦେଶ ମାଟିରୁ	Misu mora dēha ē dēsha māṭirū	Let my body mingle with the country's soil
ଦେଶବାସୀ ଗୁଲିଆଆଳୁ ପିଠିରୁ	Deshabāsi: ghūliāyā ālū pithirū	Let my countrymen walk On my back
ଦେଶରୁ ଚାଉଳ ଯଥା ଯେତେ ଗାଡ଼	gāda	Let my bones and flesh
ପୁରୁ ଯହିଁ ପଡ଼ି ମୋର ମାଂସହାତା॥	Puru tahiṇ padī mora mamsa hāda	Fill the crevices in the path of Swaraja

After these lines are recited by the *Gayaka*, the *Palia* would say that all this is right but what our leaders have learnt from Gopabandhu is something slightly different. And then he would recite the lines, slightly, but significantly, altering the words, so that the meaning becomes completely different as will be seen from the following excerpt.

ଦେଶବାସୀ ସବୁ ମିଶନ୍ତୁ ମାଟିରୁ	Deshabāsi: sabu mishantu māṭirū	Let all my countrymen mingle with the soil
ଆମର ଗୁଲିଆ ମୋର ପିଠିରୁ	Ambar ghūliyāu mōra pithirū	I will walk on their backs
ଆମର ଚାଉଳ ଯଥା ଯେତେ ଗାଡ଼	gāda	Let all the crevices on the path of my interest
ପୁରୁ ଯହିଁ ପଡ଼ି ଗାଡ଼ ମାଂସହାତା॥	Puru tahiṇ padī tāṅka mamsa hāda	Be filled with their flesh and bones

Sometimes the *Palia* may just recite these lines even without the *Gayaka* reciting the lines from the poet Gopabandhu. The audience (which generally knows Gopabandhu's lines) notices this and responds to the parody.

To cite another example, Jagannath Das's Oriya *Bhagabat* is perhaps the one literary work which is universally known, read and listened to in rural Orissa. It is composed in rhymed verse with nine letters in each line. Sometimes, using the same metre and line-scheme and the form of the sage Shuka narrating the story to King Parikshita, the *Palia* would improvise lines severely critical of the rapacity of a modern Brahmin priest, his ridiculous actions and his total ignorance.

ଶୁଣ ପରାଷ ନରାଣିଅ ।
 ତାମିରା ଶୁଣୁଆ ପଣାନବୁଦ ॥
 ଶ୍ରୀ ଅରାବ ବିବର୍ଚ୍ଚିତ ।
 ବିରା ପରାସ ଶୁଣାଉଦ ॥
 ବିନ ଗୁଣିଗୁଣୁ ଆର ।
 ପଦି ପୁରୁଷ ପଦେ ଦାସ ॥
 ହରିଆ ଗାୟତ୍ରୀ ମଳୁହାନ ।
 ବିରୁଷ ଗୁଣିଗୁଣୁ ପୋମାନ ॥
 ପୋୟୁରୁ ନ ପିଟେ ଗୋବି
 ଯଦମାନ ଗୁଣୁରୁ ଗୁଣୁରା ॥

Sura Pariksha Naranāthe
 Tempadī Sukhuā Pakhālbhāte
 Shree akshara bibarita
 Chitā parit sushobhita
 Bile bachhibāku āgga
 Dahi chudāku bagha
 Sandhvā Gāyatri hina
 Bilaru bāchhanī mina
 Pothiru naphita dori
 Jajamāna chāula chori.

Listen, O King Pariksha
 (He takes) salted dry fish
 and soaked rice. He does
 not even know the alphabet
 but is well-decorated with the
 sacred thread and sandalwood
 paste. Always ready to go
 for dweeding operations
 in the field, he jumps up at
 the prospect of a feast in
 a funeral ceremony. He does
 not even know the evening
 Gayatri mantra and he rushes
 out to catch small fish in the
 paddy fields. He never even
 opens the palm-leaf manuscripts
 but is great in stealing the
 rice of his jajamāna

In the *Gayaka's* recitation, the recurring literary themes are: the different segments of the day such as morning, noon, evening and night; the six seasons, nature, the landscape and the human emotions associated with the seasons; the beauty of nature embodied in rivers, the sky, the hills and clouds, bird songs and forests; and woman, that eternal theme of poetry, her beauty and grace, her face, her body, her eyes, her coiffure, her dress etc. While he describes any of these, the *Gayaka* brings in the various ways in which different poets have dealt with these subjects and shows his brilliance by comparing and contrasting them.

Pala, however, is not merely literature. It is poetry that is sung and acted. The *Gayaka*, therefore, is expected to be quite conversant with *raga-s* and *ragini-s*, *tala* and *laya*. Most of the *raga-s* are of course Orissi *raga-s* and about twelve are usually employed. Kavisurya Baladev Rath's celebrated *Champu-s* and Upendra Bhanja's *Kavya-s* are well-suited for musical rendering, as also the works of Gangadhar Meher.

The more well-known and frequently used Orissi *raga-s* in *Pala* recitation are: Chokhi, Kamodi, Baradi, Bangala-sri, Ramakeri, Kalahansa-kedara, Ashadha-shukla, Rasakulya, Kannada, Ahari, Mangala-gujjari and Pahadia-kedara. From the point of view of *raga-base*, one can broadly divide the epics and poetic works of Oriya poets (used in *Pala* recitation) into two groups. In the first group are the works of Radhanath Ray, Gangadhar Meher, and Nandakishore Bala. These three poets mainly employ Bangala-sri, Ramakeri, Rasakulya and Mangala-gujjari *raga-s*. For example, almost the whole of *Pranayaballari* by Gangadhar Meher is in Bangala-sri *raga*. Nandakishore's *Sharmistha* and Radhanath Ray's *Chandrabhaga* mainly use Ramakeri and Rasakulya *raga-s*. These are simple and sweet-sounding *raga-s*. Compared to them, the second group of poets use the more difficult *raga-s* like Chokhi, Kamodi, Kalahansa-kedara, etc. Upendra Bhanja may be regarded as the

leader in this group and most of his works are used in *Pala* recitation. *Bidagdha Chintamani* of Abhimanyu Samanta Singhar and Dinakrushna Das's *Rasakallola* belong to the same group. Sri Golakh Pradhan, a modern epic writer, who is considered in the line of Upendra Bhanja, has written three epics (*Satyabhama*, *Indurekha* and *Dakshina*) and most of them are in the pattern of *raga-s* used by Upendra Bhanja. These three epics are also very liberally used in *Pala* recitation.

These Orissi *raga-s* do not have much in common with classical Hindustani *raga-s*. They are generally not related to a specific emotion or *rasa*. For example, one may render a song in Chokhi *raga* both in *hasya rasa* or *karuna rasa*. Secondly, the *raga-s* are also not time-specific: particular *raga-s* are not supposed to be sung at a particular time of the day or night.

The *tala-s*, too, do not fall within the framework of the *tala-s* used in Hindustani classical music. The singer varies the *tala* according to the convenience of his recitation.

The voice of the *Gayaka* has to be attractive since an unmusical rendering will hardly make an impact on the audience. When the *Gayaka* has just one *Palia*, the former assumes a number of roles in succession and has thus to express himself adequately and effectively in each role. The celebrated *Gayaka* Harinatha (of recent times) would act the role of Harishchandra, Shaiyya, Rohitaswa and the keeper of the funeral-ground with equal ease and grace. As Shaiyya, he would make the audience weep with his wailing for the dead son and then assume the calm and collected voice of King Harishchandra. In the presentation of the theme and in its enactment, there is emphasis on *rasa* and all the traditional nine *rasa-s* are delineated. A degree of histrionic talent is thus very necessary for the *Gayaka* and very often he delineates a theme through the single actor assuming many roles with the *Palia* merely acting as a counter-point facilitating the role-change.

Among the distinguished *Gayaka-s* of modern times are Niranjana Kara and Harekrishna Nath, who were honoured with the titles of *Gayaka Mani* and *Gayaka Ratna* respectively.

More recently some *Gayaka-s* have tried to introduce contemporary themes in *Pala* but, by and large, they have not succeeded in this effort. The *Pala* form has to be a verse form, suitable for recitation, set to music or at least sung as music. Some of the social or political themes of our times do not lend themselves to such a presentation. It is, however, possible that at a future date such *Pala-s* may be composed and presented. One hopeful sign is that a few educated individuals have begun to present *Pala* as a part-time profession. Perhaps they will be able to add significantly to the themes or manner of presentation of *Pala*. The best among the *Pala Gayaka-s* of former times did not have much formal schooling: even though they were versed in Sanskrit and regional literatures. It is also heartening to note that emphasis is placed by the educated *Gayaka-s* on the traditional qualities of *Pala*, including its religious aspects, *Puja* with peace invocation, and that traditional costume and jewellery is worn. This augurs well for the future growth of a traditional literary-performing art-form combining tradition and change.

References:

- 1 The traditional name for the hillock on which the Puri Jagannatha temple stands.
- 2 A reference to Sri Chaitanya

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Pictures:

1. One of the *Palia*-s with his *ramtali*.
2. The *Gayaka* with his *chamar* in the right hand.
3. The *Palia* with his large-sized metallic cymbals.
4. Another *Palia* with his *mrudangam*.
5. The priest reading out the text of the *Pala*.

H. C. Bhayani

It appears that the *Sangitaratnakara* of Sharngadeva, composed in the first half of the thirteenth century A.D., is the earliest musicological work to mention the *Sarangi* as a type of stringed instrument. The *Sarangi* figures there in a list of some twenty-one stringed instruments beginning with the *Vina*.¹ The relevant line is as follows:

सारङ्ग्यालपनीत्यादेस्तवाद्यस्य वादकाः ।

(*Sangitaratnakara*, III, 215)

Two Prakrit works of Jain *Katha* (religious narrative) literature contain incidental references to the *Sarangi*, and these are important in that those works are earlier than the *Sangitaratnakara*. One of these works is Lakshmanagani's *Supasanahachariya*, composed in 1145 A.D. (1199 V.S.) It contains three references to the *Sarangi*.² In the tale of Manisimha, two *Vidyadhari*-s are described as singing in a Jain temple, with *Sarangi* accompaniment. The relevant verse is as follows:

पूह्य जिणपदिमाओ भचीए वंदिऊण विहिसारं ।
सारंगीगयगेयज्झुणीए गायंति गीयाइं ॥५७॥

(p. 132, v. 57)

[‘Having worshipped the Jina images with devotion and performing *vandana* with proper ceremony, they were singing songs accompanied by the musical notes of the *Sarangi*.]

Further in the same narrative, the musical notes of the *Sarangi* are said to be drowned in the bustle created by the crowd of *Vidyadhara*-s rushing in for worship:

तो तेण कल्यलेण सारंगिरवम्भि अवलविज्जंते ।
एउमावईय भवणे गंतूणं ताउ गायंति ॥६०॥

(v. 60)

[‘As that bustle was drowning the notes of the *Sarangi*, they moved to the shrine of Padmavati and continued to sing there.’]

In the third reference, it is said that when the two *Vidyadhari*-s saw the extremely handsome *Vidyadhara* princes, Sena and Visena, they were so wonder-struck that the *Sarangi*-s dropped from their hands.³

ताओवि ताण रुवं पिच्छंतीओ तहाहया तेण ।
सारंगीओ कराओ पढियाउवि जह न वेयंति ॥६४॥

(v. 64)

[‘They, too, gazing at their handsome form were so struck by it that

they were not even conscious of the *Sarangi*-s dropping from their hands.')

Another similar Prakrit work of Jain religious tales takes the *Sarangi* still a century earlier. There are two references to the *Sarangi* in Jineshvarasuri's *Kathakoshaprakarana*, composed in 1052 A.D. (1108 V.S.).

The first reference occurs in a passage describing a dance performance in the tale of Shurasena, illustrating the religious merits of Jina worship. The relevant verse is as follows:

वीणा-तिसरिब-सारंगियाइस्मीसकागलीगीयं ।
गिज्जह वेणुरवो बि हु उच्छलइ तदंतरालेसु ॥

(*Kathakoshaprakarana*, p. 30, 1.30)

['Kakali song, blended with the notes of the *Vina*, *Trisarika*, *Sarangi* etc., was sung. The notes of flute, too, shot up intermittently through these notes'.]

The second reference occurs in the tale of Simhakumara, illustrating the religious merits of singing a hymn to the Jina. The concerned passage⁴ is otherwise also quite important in the context of the history of the science of music.

While classifying various types of music, the *Sarangi* is mentioned among the stringed instruments as follows:

तिसमुदठाणं गंधर्व्यं । तं जहा-तंति-समुत्थं, वेणु-समुत्थं, गणुय-समुत्थं च ।
तव्यं तंति-समुत्थं वीण-तिसरी-सारंगियाह-अणेगिहं ।

['Gandharva (melodic music) originates from three sources as follows: from a string, from a bamboo, from a human being.

Of these, that which originates from a string is of several types, for instance produced by the *Vina*, *Trisari*, *Sarangi*, etc.].

Foot-notes:

- 1 The *Sangitaratnakara* gives a detailed description of various musical instruments in Chapter Six, but the *Sarangi* finds no mention there. The afore-mentioned reference to the *Sarangi* is duly given in the Index to Vol. II.
- 2 Attention to this was drawn by me in the *Quarterly Journal of the National Centre for the Performing Arts*, X 1, 1981, pp 49-50.
- 3 The *Pae-Saddamahanavo* has noted the word under this reference.
- 4 This passage is historically important as it touches upon some well-known topics in the theory of music. It is reproduced in Sanskrit verse by Munisundarasuri in his *Jeyananda-kevalicharita* (composed in c. 1430 A.D.). Its prose recast was made by Padmevijaya in 1802 A.D.

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Veedhi Natakam Festival, Hyderabad, October 9-10, 1981

A two-day *Veedhi Natakam* Festival and a Seminar on the subject, organised by the Andhra Pradesh Natak Akademi, were inaugurated by Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya at Hyderabad on October 9, 1981. The festival brought together different folk troupes on one platform and provided a unique opportunity to scholars and serious students of the theatre to study the form from various angles. The Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, sent its documentation unit to record the performances on video.

Veedhi Natakam of Andhra Pradesh is performed in the open air. The stage is one end of the street or a make-shift platform, with a thatched roof and petromax lights. The audience sits on three sides of the platform. The stories are drawn from the *Purana*-s, the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*. Among the many varieties of *Veedhi Natakam*, the festival selected for presentation *Veedhi Bhagavatam*, *Chenchu Natak*, *Oggukatha*, *Ramayana Natak* and *Draupadivastrapaharanam Natak*, which were performed by reputed troupes. A close link was seen with the traditional *Kuchipudi* dance-dramas and the *Yakshagana* form. In the beginning the *Nandi* is sung in the traditional *Nata raga* and invocation songs are in praise of Vinayaka, Saraswati and Nataraja. There is also *Prastavana* in the tradition of the Sanskrit theatre and the *Patrapravesha daru*-s, introducing the main characters with *nritta*, *nriya* and *natya* (with *vachikabhinaya*) on the lines of the *Kuchipudi* dance-drama. *Veedhi Natakam* as a theatre makes several demands on the actor. And the totality of this theatre is seen at its best when an actor sings, dances, impersonates the character he portrays while retaining a certain spontaneity and the theatrical conventions with which the rural audiences relate themselves with considerable familiarity.

Kurchela Brahmananda Bhagavatar from Athava (L. Kota, in Vizianagaram District) gave a superb exposition of the folk version of *Bhamakalapam*. His three daughters are trained in *Veedhi Bhagavatam* and his two sons in music. The eldest daughter, Anjali, is extremely gifted and enthralled the audience with her singing and total involvement. The text by poet Kellaga Appaya Kavi, who died a hundred years ago, is replete with humour reflecting the aspirations of the common people, and is transmitted orally to disciples. Kurchela Brahmananda includes in his repertoire *Gollakalapam*, *Ksheerasagaramathanam*, *Sarangadhara* and *Bhamakalapam*. Other artistes in the tradition include Misala Appala Naidu (of Mukundapara), Misala Jogi Naidu, Bontalkoti Jagannath Bhagavata, Dola Shankardu (of Baduva) and Borada Gavarayya. Most of them are agriculturists and perform during various festivals. On an average they present five to seven performances every year and earn five hundred rupees per performance.

Vaignanika Kala Kendra of Tallapaka presented *Draupadivastrapaharanam Natak*. The troupe is managed by Muniramaraju who does not perform himself but supervises the production. T. Subbarayulu in the role of Dussasana and B. Venkatraju as Draupadi gave splendid performances. As a matter of fact,

all the actors were folk singers and performed with abandon. Shri Rama Natya Mandali from Gattapalli, Karimnagar District, presented the *Sundarkanda* from the *Ramayana*. *Chenchu Natak* by Nagi Reddy Satyanarayana's troupe from Draksharam, East Godavari District, is very popular with the people. They charge about eighteen hundred to two thousand rupees for every performance. Nagi Reddy is a lorry driver and the members of his troupe are farmers. In *Sundarkanda*, one saw all the actors providing supporting music though dressed in different costumes and enacting different roles. As soon as the actor was not required on the scene, he would stand at the back and sing the text.

In *Oggukatha*, performed to a drum called *Oggu*, the leader of the troupe, Sukka Sattaya, an outstanding actor, changed costumes on the stage during the course of the play and enacted the role of a woman and a man alternately. His transformation was breathtaking and one noticed a very impressive range of acting talent in these folk plays.

The seminar was aimed at discovering the interaction between these folk forms and classical forms. The discussion centred round the *Deshi* and *Margi* concepts. The participants were themselves actors like the renowned *Burrakatha* exponents, Naazer and Koganti, who demonstrated various aspects of *Burrakatha*. They also discussed how these forms were used during the pre-Independence era to rouse political consciousness among the people. Nataraj Ramakrishna, the President of the Andhra Pradesh Nritya Akademi, demonstrated how, with a slight shift, certain aspects of these forms lent themselves a classical touch. The terms *Yakshagana* and *Veedhi Natakam* were also discussed and attention was drawn to similar forms in different regions of India. *Tamasha*, *Bhavai*, *Terukoothu*, *Jatra*, *Bhand*, *Ramlila*, *Rasalila* and *Veedhi Natakam* share a common tradition.

The three Akademis in Andhra Pradesh are constituted as independent bodies. The *Nataka*, the *Sangeet* and the *Nritya* Akademis are housed in the same building in Kala Bhavan, in the compound of Ravindra Bharati Theatre. However, they work in close collaboration and devote attention to various forms by arranging such seminars and expositions. The documentation on video opens up many opportunities for an indepth study of various art forms of the region. It is now possible to bring these forms within the reach of urban audiences through the medium of video.

SUNIL KOTHARI

Utsav '81, Bhopal, November 1—8, 1981

The week-long *Utsav*, held annually by the Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad in Bhopal, is a festival with a difference. Year after year, a representative body of

musicians, dancers, theatre artistes and writers from all over the country participate in this event with a sense of deep involvement. Discerning spectators from all strata of society share this sense of involvement, and attend in large numbers the daily *sammelan* sessions with renewed anticipation.

This year *Utsav '81* was held for eight days. As in previous years, the event proved to be a big draw because the artistes billed to appear during the festival were highly accomplished in their own fields. Due representation was also given to talent of promise in the field of music.

Ravi Shankar performed at the inaugural session. His repertoire, covering Hem-Bihag, Bihag, Kaunshi-Kanada and a *thumri* (based on Manj-Khamaj) was true to type. The choice of Hem-Bihag was particularly significant since it is the creation of his mentor, Ustad Alauddin Khan. As chief court musician of the former princely state of Maihar (in Madhya Pradesh), the Ustad had composed the *raga* and imparted its style of presentation to Ravi Shankar and to his other *shagird-s*. In the opinion of some music lovers, who have listened to Ravi Shankar for more than three decades, the maestro did not rise to his full stature during the recital.

Surprisingly, Budhaditya Mukherjee, the 26-year-old sitarist, seemed to have made a much deeper impact on the audience by his *Jhinjhoti*, Malkauns and the final *dhun*. His originality and virtuosity afforded ample evidence of a superior talent emerging on the musical scene.

Kumar Gandharva and Kishori Amonkar, who are, by common consent, leaders of the *avant garde* movement in Hindustani music, struck their distinctive note of individualism in their performances. Kumar Gandharva's recital included Malavati (his own creation), Khambavati, and two Nirguni *bhajan-s*, while Kishori Amonkar offered Yaman and Vibhasa and, oddly enough, Bhairavi between these two *raga-s*.

On the other hand, Malini Rajurkar, who is groomed in the Gwalior *gharana*, adhered to the traditional style in her *khayal-s* in Bageshri and Kaishiki-Ranjani and the *tappa* in Bhairavi.

M. S. Subbulakshmi's was probably the best vocal recital of the *sammelan*. She was in her element from start to finish. The Carnatic *kriti-s* and the devotional compositions in several Indian languages continued in smooth succession for three hours and moved the listeners by their evocative power and deep feeling.

The dance programmes included a recital by Yamini Krishnamurty, whose presentations in Bharata Natyam and Kuchipudi, despite their brevity, reaffirmed her claim to the eminence she has come to enjoy in her field. There was one session entirely devoted to dance recitals in which Uma Sharma (Katak) and Sanjukta Panigrahi (Odissi) were featured. Although they are exponents of totally different traditional styles, the quality of their performance triggered comparisons. Sanjukta Panigrahi's aesthetic sensibility and her statuesque stage presence, as much as her husband Raghunath's vocal *sangat*, swept the audience off its feet. *Abhinaya* was probably the saving grace of Uma Sharma's recital.

Vedantam Satyanarayana Sharma gave a memorable performance. His uncanny depiction (in the Kuchipudi tradition) of episodes from the epics and Indian mythology, his *Bhama-Kalapam*, *Dashavataram* and *Ushaparinayam* and the strikingly feminine roles he portrayed were both impressive and expressive.

A ballet based on the late Shankar Shesh's work *Khajuraho Ke Shilpa* was yet another attraction of the festival. Presented by the Shri Ram Kala Kendra of New Delhi, it unfolded before the viewers an exciting array of fantastic period costumes. Its impact was essentially visual. Nadira Babbar's play, *Yahudi Ki Ladki*, evoked mixed reactions. The reason is that its powerful theme has lost much of its appeal over the years. To sustain the interest of the audience, the producers made an effort to include a few humorous interludes which had little relevance to the main story.

The finale of the festival will be long remembered for the superb performances of a team of folk artistes from Madhya Pradesh. The artistes, in colourful costumes, presented their numbers with authenticity and natural grace.

Two other highlights of *Utsav '81* were Jeram Patel's exhibition of his paintings and a session of poetry readings by leading writers from the state. Both these events attracted sizeable crowds.

MOHAN NADKARNI

Workshop on Masks and Mask-like Makeup in Traditional Theatre: Their Relevance in Education. School of Drama, University of Calicut, November 16—30, 1981.

Tall trees, dark green shadows, the sunlight playing on fresh paddy fields, the meandering back waters of Kerala are the landscape. Coconut and arecanut rise high above, connecting heaven and the earth, standing as a symbol of the centre of the earth, the *axis mundi* and the *stambha* of Indian mythology. While modern environmentalists and propagators of environment education are devising ways and means of structuring and evolving models for environmental studies, in Kerala, as elsewhere in India and South-east Asia, are strategies which have been evolved from time immemorial for relating man to nature and nature to man. This relationship of man and nature, the human and the tree, the human and the animal and the human and the divine is at the core of arriving at an eco-psychic balance between man and his environment. Amongst the many ways by which this inter-relationship is codified or legitimised is one that relates to ritual. Through the functional object ritualised, a primary aspect of nature is overlaid with myth and divinity; resultantly, the most useful object in the environment assumes a ritual status which ensures its preservation and conservation. In Kerala, the coconut and the arecanut are the most familiar among the trees, essential to the region's ecology, environment, trade economics and religion.

A Workshop was organised at the School of Drama, University of Calicut, and sponsored by the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, New Delhi, around this one major feature because it provided an opportunity to bring together three different types of people. There were the traditional tribal communities who have used the coconut, its trunk, its leaves, its grass, its fruit for everything in everyday living as also for the Masks and the Mask-like Makeup in their traditional theatre forms, particularly in the *Teyyam* and *Padayani* forms. There was then a group of high school teachers and, finally, twenty drama students of the University of Calicut. The problem before these three groups was at one level to study the theatre, namely, Mask and Mask-like Makeup in Traditional Theatre. At another deeper level, it was the use of the coconut for understanding the whole concept of environmental education. The structuring of the seminar, under the able guidance of Prof. G. Shankara Pillai, was carefully planned. All the three groups were given similar problems and the response to the problem was watched. On the whole, the tribal groups, especially the Malayans, the Marars and others were far more creative, quick, innovative than the others. It was also observed that the tribal had a far greater capacity for creating symbols for multi-level communication than the educated groups, that is the teachers and the students of drama. This was a learning experience for the educated.

The second and more explicit goal of the Workshop was to make the teachers and the students of drama aware of the rich traditional theatre forms of Kerala, all belonging to that category where natural objects (ephemeral in their nature) are chosen for creating stupendous headgear, costumes and jewellery. Kerala is known for its several dance-dramas and theatrical traditions. Many of them are precursors, of *Krishnattam*, *Kathakali* and other forms. Of great antiquity are the forms known as *Teyyam*, *Terriyattam* and *Mudi yettu*. Although it is not possible, in a report, to give an account of all the forms and the entire experience of the Workshop, the *Mudi yettu* performance, which was followed by that of the *Teyyam* and *Padayani*, will convey some idea of the power of this form.

In *Mudi yettu*, the Kurups and the Marars are the performers. The Kurups are known for their skill in drawing. An enclosure or *mandap* is temporarily set up, a centre is established, a line is drawn. The Kurup master, with a lightness of touch (through this one line and the centre), brings to life, with amazing swiftness, a figure of Bhadrakali. Quick strokes create the head, the torso, the open position of the lower limbs; semi-circles give the outline of the head, the torso, the arms and the legs. The outlines are first filled in with primary colours. Other colours are piled upon specific parts to provide volume to the figure. Turmeric, burnt coconut leaves for green and the darker hues for black, kumkum for red, and before your eyes rises the mighty figure of Bhadrakali (made up of all these colours and cereals) come to life. The icon on the ground is not uni-dimensional since the colours are piled one upon the other to define ornaments and the contours of the huge bust of Bhadrakali. The skirt made of kumkum and lime appears as a rich textured piece of tapestry. The anklets and the ornaments of silver or gold are perfect in design. In her eight arms, the deity holds the diverse weapons of her power. In one of these is the severed head of that demon of demons called Drika. The ritual of drawing the figure (nearly 12 sq. ft.) on the ground is conducted to the accompaniment of drumming

and singing and is completed to synchronise with the rising crescendo of the drums. Once the image is completed, the *Tantri* (Priest) sits to worship this goddess who is his creation. The idea, the given 'form' is brought to life through the *mantra*-s and the recitations of the *Tantri*. The lamp, which had been lit in the beginning, is continually filled with oil. It is the symbol of the beginning and of the consecrated circle reconstructing mythical time. The *Tantri* continues his recitation, the drumming becomes louder and gradually a dance begins, not in and around the figure but over the figure. In wild frenzy, almost as if possessed by the spirit of the goddess, the *Tantri* now moves first carefully and then madly over the entire figure. In a trance the figure is desecrated. There is no painting left, no image, only the idea and the light of a lamp.

The idea comes to life through concrete form and the form returns to the formless in the first phase. But 'energy' released is symbolised in the lighted lamp which is carried to the second arena of the actual performance. Now it is the Marars and not the Kurups who perform the drama. The singing, the recitation to the performances is the ritual enactment of the myth of the killing of the Asura Darika by Kali. As is common in most myths in India relating to power, its limitations and its destructiveness, here, too, the story revolves around the demon who had sought boons from Shiva. The demon's austerities and meditation had made him the recipient of these boons. Naturally it was eternity which was the boon that Darika, wanted. Shiva laughed, "So, no man should kill you? And also no woman either?" Darika disdainfully replied, "Yes, no man should kill me, but of woman I am not afraid; it would be demeaning to ask the Lord for a boon to be saved from a woman." So the demon went on to amass power, challenging his enemies in all the directions of the world. He was torn by anxieties regarding unknown enemies, who might come forward to fight him.

Cosmic balance is now disturbed. The gods plead before Shiva. A Nandi head emerges from the top of a half-curtain to reassure them. Thereafter the entry of Darika through the audience, with torches (*mashal*-s) lighting up his demon-like face, painted with the same texture and colours as that of the image, is spectacular and dramatic. He emerges as if from the primeval forces of the environment, the lush trees, the tall forests, the shadows of the coconuts and now, instead of the sun, the moon shimmers through the leaves. Darika runs in different quarters, eager to hear the cries of enemies, but he can hear no shouts, except the echoes of his own voice. Then comes a voice, from the mountains and the forests, a voice he does not recognise, a voice feeble and feminine, distant but sharp. This is the voice of the woman—Kali, who challenges the demon. The inevitable happens. Darika, though not afraid of woman, now remembers that Shiva's boon will save him from male but not female foes. He is afraid. Even so, confident of his power, he appears to vanquish Kali. But this is temporary; she is revived and then begins the dance of this powerful energy who crushes the desire for power. As theatrical spectacle, the performance is tightly structured with exits, entries, diagonals, crossings, use of spatial areas, freezing, pauses and blockings. At the level of myth it underpins the eternal theme of power and its limitations.

Darika is vanquished by Kali but not without a heroic battle being fought. This battle presents the confrontation of not only good and evil but also that

of desire for power and its limitations. Diverse theatrical media of expression are used, ranging from the recited words to the sung word, from a system of questions and answers to singing and drumming. This is further supported by large leaps on the ground and in the air, dramatic exits and entries and a fairly developed vocabulary of movement. Most impressive is the transformation of the face through the mask-like makeup. The headgears, made of bamboo and coconut, lend an aura of mystery. It is as if the coconut comes to life through these mythical figures. *Mudiyettu* culminates in a moment of trance when the actor, who plays the role of Kali, is possessed with this divine power of the goddess.

The story continues now in another form called the *Padayani*. Kali, no doubt, has killed the evil, as also power in the form of Darika. But Kali herself, though divine in nature, is subject to the same laws of the cosmos as humans. Having tasted the gratification of killing, even if it is of evil, she can no longer resist its attraction. Now it is she who goes from quarter to quarter, direction to direction, seeking evil; and the power to kill has great destructive force. Soon she is unable to control herself: the paradox of using power to vanquish power and a torrential release of energy unable to control itself form the kernel of this myth. Ecological balances and cosmic order are once again disturbed. Shiva, who had released this energy in the form of Kali, has once again to be called from the heights of Kailash to quieten the destructive forces which have been unleashed.

In the *Padayani*, all masks are made out of arecanut. Flat in character, the masks, headgears, and the costumes all use the tree. The story begins with the moment after the killing of Darika. All life in nature is brought to help quieten the goddess. This gives ample opportunity for animals, birds, aquatic life and human beings to enter as part of the theatrical spectacle. Ultimately, it is only when Kali is at the foothills of Kailash that she can be quietened, literally and metaphorically. The performance of *Padayani* gives ample scope for relating the terrestrial and the celestial.

In the *Teyyam*, the performers are not only actors, playing the role of Kali, of Darika or Shiva but they represent humans as deified icons of particular forms of Kali or Shiva. Again it is the coconut tree or the arecanut tree which is basic. Ornaments ranging from wrist bands to necklaces to skirts and monumental headgears are all made out of coconut leaves. The performer is transformed into a larger-than-life figure, wearing a headgear which can be as high as four feet, or a skirt with a girth of five feet. He is one of several Kalis: he can be *Rakta Chamunda* or *Poothan Teyyam*. Each has an accompanying myth, which is narrated by the singer or musician. Ritual precedes the performance and the *Kalari* gymnastics are essential preliminaries.

The character enters the arena dramatically, takes a few steps, executes movements but gradually works himself to a frenzy and finally a trance. The uniqueness of *Teyyam* lies in the transformation of a human body into an enlarged figure. The archetypal figures come to life and disappear into the darkness. The three worlds, the human, the demonic and the divine can all be seen in one body, either through the height of the headgears or the enlargement of the waist through skirts made of bamboo. The ritual which precedes and follows

the performance is punctuated with many impressive presentations of sword and shield, dagger and pincers display. The story content is only narrated; there is no attempt at enacting the story. This is a very essential difference between the *Mudiyettu*, the *Padayani*, the *Kummatti*, on the one hand, and the *Teyyam* and the *Terriyattam* forms on the other. The communities, which enact the forms, though scheduled castes and deprived in the socio-economic sense, find immunity at this moment because behind the mask and the mask-like makeup is the freedom of this man who can now command all aspects of life and society, heaven and earth. Hierarchies are broken; the caste system is challenged and the social disorder in contemporary India is commented upon. This is the world of consecrated time, the world of the theatrical spectacle closed in a circle of particular duration and space. Through eternalising the most common among the objects in the environment and giving it mythical proportions, there is the possibility of communicating messages valid for here and now and for a life hereafter.

These performances are not stage spectacles with a hiatus between performers and audience. The experience is a total experience of those deified and those who watch the 'deity'. The communication is absolute and despite the variance in cultural background of many amongst those who participated in the performances (whether from Europe or America, England or South-east Asia, Kashmir or Bengal), it was possible for the coconut to speak an eternal language through the Bhadrakali and the Darika of the *Mudiyettu* and *Padayani* and the several *Teyyam*-s and the *Kummatti* masks.

—KAPILA VATSYAYAN

[Pictures of the *Mudiyettu*, *Padayani* and *Teyyam* forms mentioned in this report have been kindly provided by the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training. The design on the four covers is by Ratnakar Sohoni.

—Editor]

RASA, World Premiere at the Tata Theatre, Bombay, December 6, 1981

The world premiere of *RASA*, commissioned by the National Centre for the Performing Arts, took place at the Tata Theatre, Bombay, on Sunday, December 6, 1981. The programme was sponsored by the Centre and Max Mueller Bhavan, Bombay. *RASA*, composed by Peter-Michael Hamel, applies modern techniques of European choir music so that the integral Indian elements achieve a new sound quality. According to the composer, his effort was not to illustrate, musically, the nine archetypal moods (*rasa*-s) but to transpose his perception of *rasa* by combining and superimposing, in sound, human sentiments, using Western—European—means. As he puts it, "A *rasamalika* grew for an eight-voice choir accompanied by tabla, tanpura and piano." The Choir was the Cantata Choir, Bombay, Conductor Joachim Buehler. The performers were Situ Singh Buehler (Soprano), Peter-Michael Hamel (Piano) and Sankha Chatterjee (Tabla).

RASA was performed in Delhi on December 13, 1981. *RASA* will also be performed by the San Francisco Symphonic Chorus under Louis Magor in March 1982, and by the Rias Chamber Chorus under Prof. Uwe Gronostay in April, 1982.



1981 — International Year of Disabled Persons

The National Centre for the Performing Arts itself sponsored and was associated with several programmes organised as part of the observance of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons.

Vijayanthimala, the well-known Bharata Natyam dancer, gave a recital on December 13 at the Tata Theatre and generously agreed to donate her entire fees to the cause of the disabled. The performance was in aid of the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund, with a request that the proceeds be earmarked for the disabled.

S. R. Krishnamurthi, a disabled musician who, in spite of his disabilities, has achieved a high standard in his singing, gave a recital of Karnatic music on November 16, in the Centre's mini auditorium.

Two hundred disabled children were invited to witness the children's ballet, *Panchatantra*, presented at the Tata Theatre on November 21, by Avishkar in Marathi.

Among the most memorable programmes at the Tata Theatre were the three performances (in aid of the disabled) of The National Theatre of the Deaf, U.S.A., sponsored by the Centre and Seagull Empire in collaboration with the U.S. International Communication Agency. Five artistes (four of whom were deaf) presented a programme, which included three fables by Aesop and *A Child's Christmas in Wales* by Dylan Thomas.

The Centre and the British Council Division presented a cello recital of Anup Kumar Biswas, with Tehmie Gazdar (pianoforte), on January 7 at the Tata Theatre. The recital was in aid of the spastics and Anup Kumar Biswas donated his fees to the Fund.

The Tata Theatre was also the venue of programmes arranged by other organisations in aid of the disabled.

On September 10, 11 and 12, a Festival of Dance and Music was arranged by Kala Sangham (Grindlay's Bank), featuring Bismillah Khan, M. S. Subbulakshmi, Kalanidhi Narayan, Bhimsen Joshi, Amjad Ali Khan and Nasir Aminuddin Dagar.

CRY (Child Relief and You), a group dedicated to helping deprived children, presented three performances in November at the Tata Theatre of *Not Quite As You Like It*, featuring four British 'clowns' (Robbie, Jonni, David and Jan) in a programme based on the traditions of the English Tenting Circus and the Italian Commedia dell'Arte.

A Slide Show (*Ram Nam Satya Hai*) was presented at the Tata Theatre on November 28 by R. N. Dubey on behalf of the Society for the Rehabilitation of Paraplegics.

The National Theatre of the Deaf, U.S.A.

The National Centre for the Performing Arts and Seagull Empire, in collaboration with the U.S. International Communication Agency, presented three performances (in aid of the disabled) of the National Theatre of the Deaf, U.S.A. at the Tata Theatre on December 28 and 29, 1981. Founded in 1967 by David Hays, the NTD has delighted and astonished audiences on five continents with their joyous, colourful work which they perform in a new medium, -visual theatre (a combination of strong and graceful sign language with dance, music, movement and simultaneous narration).

The NTD received the Special Tony (Antoinette Perry) Award in 1977; in 1980, the National Association of the Deaf honoured (with its prestigious Centennial Award) this company which has "added a new dimension to communication receptivity and created an enriched appreciation of the capabilities and talents of deaf people throughout the world."

The performances began with *A Sports Introduction*, went on to depict *A Bad Child's Alphabet*, a cameo, *The Giving Tree*, followed by three well-known fables of Aesop. The most impressive item was *A Child's Christmas in Wales* where the rich visual imagery of Dylan Thomas was interpreted by the four deaf artistes (Carol Lee Aquiline, Charles Baird, Michael Lamitola and Nat Wilson) and one hearing artiste (Jody Steiner) with such precision and intensity that the words were not only heard but also seen. The hearing member of the cast spoke and interpreted her own lines in the 'sign' language and also spoke the lines that her deaf colleagues signed. This entire experience which involved both the ear and eye was moving in a way that left the legitimate theatre far behind. The enactment retained its substance as theatre for hearing audiences, was faithful to the spirit of Dylan Thomas' words and even gave some insights into what is missing in our spoken theatre.

The secret of the group's impact was revealed in *Your Game* when the audience was invited to name an object to be depicted by the cast. Even as a child uttered the word 'washing machine', Jody signed it, spoke it and her colleagues responded with lightning speed. One came forward and signed that he was the jogger, another was to be his shirt, the third a bar of soap, the fourth became the switch and the fifth became the blades. The whole process, starting with the jogging to the washing (as the blades swished mercilessly), the wringing and drying came vividly to life. The swift response of each actor, the co-ordination of moves, the conjuring of a complex of activities revealed the imaginative powers of the actors, a fine sense of co-ordination and timing, and an uncanny ability to communicate in a direct and effective manner. Even the suggestion of a hearing-aid made by an insensitive member of the audience was taken up for visualization and enactment without the slightest hesitation. Not a single gesture was wasted, and the power of expression regulated to such a fine degree to suggest tone and intensity that one wondered whether the normal language we employ is not more of a barrier than an aid.



From A Child's Christmas in Wales

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)

Last year two centenaries of famous composers were celebrated in March, of the Russian composer, Modest Mussorgsky, (who died on March 28, 1881) and of the Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók (who was born on March 25, 1881). Apart from the fact that both of them drew on peasant and folk-music in their creative output, the most notable thing that they have in common is the year 1881. Mussorgsky used traditional harmonic processes, although his music was highly coloured with the Russian folk-idiom. His chords often seemed crude to contemporary musicians and the aristocracy of St. Petersburg were openly contemptuous of the music of the new nationalist school, "coachmen's music" as they called it.

Bartók, on the other hand, was an iconoclast, revelling in discord for its own sake, atonalism, the "wrong note" school of composition as it is sometimes called. It is incredible—the change that musical language underwent by the turn of the century!

The great Russian musical dramatist Modest Mussorgsky was born in the province of Pskov, a very pleasant country district. His mother gave him his first piano lessons and he made so much progress that he was playing small pieces of Liszt at the age of seven. At nine, he played a concerto by John Field before a large audience in his parents' home.

When the family moved to St. Petersburg, the young Mussorgsky had lessons with Anton Herke, a pupil of Henselt. There he played a concert Rondo by Herz at a private charity concert. At the age of thirteen he entered the Cadet School of the Guards and, while there, composed a Polka, which was proudly published by his father. In 1856, he entered the famous Preobrazhensky Regiment, but resigned his commission after two years in order to study composition with Balakirev. His first works were small piano pieces and songs. He then went on to carry out operatic experiments.

Mussorgsky's great achievement was his opera *Boris Godunov* (based on Russian history as dramatized by Pushkin), which occupied him from 1868-1872. This monumental work made its impact in the West in Diaghilev's Season of Russian Opera in Paris in 1908, when Feodor Chaliapin sang the part of Boris.

Mussorgsky's largest piano work, *Pictures from an Exhibition*, was based on items from a memorial exhibition of the work of his friend Victor Hartmann (architect and designer) who died in 1873. The exhibition was arranged by the art critic Vladimir Stasov, who was a driving force in the cultural life of St. Petersburg in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was he who coined the phrase, 'The Mighty Handful or Mighty Five' to describe the composers Balakirev, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui and Mussorgsky. They formed a unique brotherhood in musical history, criticizing but appraising each others work, freely offering suggestions, and, in the case of Mussorgsky, often tidying up his compositions. Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky's great friend, not only orchestrated a good deal

of his music after his death, but even changed harmonies or notes that he considered too harsh. Subsequently most of Mussorgsky's works have been published in their original form.

Mussorgsky's last years were taken up with the composition of two operas, *Khovanshtchina* and *Sorochintzy Fair*, both left unfinished. After his death Ludmilla Shestakova, Glinka's sister, wrote, "Mussorgsky will live forever not only as the composer of *Boris Godunov* but as a rare, kind, honest and gentle man."

—PETER COOPER

Obituaries

Devilal Samar (1911-1981)

Devilal Samar (b. July 30, 1911) died in Bombay on December 3, 1981. In 1952, he founded the Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur, devoted to the folk arts of Rajasthan. Through publications, annual festivals, lectures, exhibitions and tours (throughout India and abroad), Devilal Samar fostered a serious interest in folk forms. A centre for puppetry was established and several performances of the *Ramayana*, *Panchatantra*, *Amar Singh Rathod* and other programmes were held. Devilal Samar was the recipient of honours instituted by the Government of India and cultural bodies, and represented India at several conferences abroad. The Museum of Folk Art at Udaipur, with its collection of 10,000 folk songs and the three thousand individuals associated with its puppetry training programme, is a living testimony of his dedication to the folk arts of India.

* * *

David Abraham (1908-1982)

David Abraham (b. June 1, 1908), the well-loved film actor, died in Toronto on January 3, 1982. Starting his film career in 1933, David acted in about 250 films. His most popular role was in Raj Kapoor's *Boot Polish* and his last appearance on the screen was in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Khushoorat*. For twenty-five years he compered the Filmfare Award functions and was a popular figure in the sports world. Though he functioned in an industry, notorious for its rivalries and malice, David retained his humane values and earned the affection of all those who came in contact with him.

* * *

C. Ramchandra

C. Ramchandra, the noted film music director, died in Bombay on January 5, 1982. He was sixty-three. C. Ramchandra scored the popular tunes of *Albela*, *Anarkali*, *Azad* and other films. The music of the famous song *Mere Watan Ke Logon* (sung by Lata Mangeshkar) was also composed by him.

Book Reviews

THE UNIVERSAL BASIC SCALE OF UNICENTRIC TONALITY and INDIAN MUSICAL MA-GRAMA OF BHARATA—WORLD'S ONLY PERFECT SCALE by Antsher Lobo (from *Three Monographs of Music*). Indian Musicological Society, Bombay and Baroda, 1980, Rs. 40.00 (*In English*).

The two monographs have one central theme, the author's conception of a Perfect Scale. The first monograph (of twenty-four pages) is entitled 'The Universal Basic Scale of Unicentric Tonality'. Here the author provides the historical background of the perfect scale. After mentioning the pentatonic scale of China and Egypt, the author finds the descending sequence of the Greek Dorian scale to be the 'rough-and-ready precursor model of the Universal Basic Scale to come' (p. 8). Taking up the *Shadja Grama* and the *Madhyama Grama* mentioned in the *Natyashastra* of Bharata, he declares that the latter provides the only perfect universal basic scale of unicentric tonality. The author then describes the method adopted to arrive at the basic scale and explains the logic of its structure. The main features of this basic scale that really make it basic are its unicentricity and non-symmetric structure. Bi-centric scales, according to the author, have the appearance of two-scales-in-one, since they combine in themselves two symmetrical tetrachords, and what we are looking for is an individual whole scale.

The second monograph (of about a hundred pages) is entitled 'Indian Musical Ma-Grama of Bharata—World's Only Perfect Scale'. This is really an elaboration of the first monograph. Herein the author presents the structure of the perfect scale in great detail and seeks to establish its identity with the *svara* sequence of the *Madhyama Grama*.

The author enumerates the structural features of his perfect scale in the first chapter. These are: the presence of four perfect consonances (fifth, fourth, third and sixth) of the tonic 'C', and of the nearest contrasting overtone 'G'; the presence of three tonal centres and their major triads. The same characteristics have been emphasised from different angles. Then the author asserts that this perfect scale is the same as the *Madhyama Grama* of Bharata, properly interpreted. He blames all post-Bharata theorists, commentators and musicologists for misinterpreting Bharata and for missing the true forms of the two *Grama*-s. In the second chapter, the diatonic harmony of the West also comes in for criticism, since it introduces notes foreign to the home tonality of the positive C major. In the third chapter the author explains Bharata's demonstration, with the two *vina*-s, of the modulation from the *Madhyama Grama* to the *Shadja Grama*. The various methods of computing the number of *shruti*-s are listed. They are the superimposition, differential, sliding, bicyclic and algebraic methods.

The fourth chapter begins with a description of the bi-cyclic method. Here the author introduces the concepts of positive and negative scales, the latter denoting the descending forms of the former. In the fifth chapter, the two-*vina*-demonstration is taken up in detail. The values of the different intervals—*chatuhshruti*, *trishruti* and *dvishruti*—are derived by the algebraic method. The following

terms, 'expedient and absolute notations', 'tonic centre—convergent and acoustic' and 'tonic—absolute and modal', are defined and explained in the sixth chapter, wherein the true modes of the *Shadja* and *Madhyama Grama*-s are pointed out. Of the seven modes constituting a *Grama*, only one is regarded as the true acoustic mode, while the rest are declared to be false modes.

In the seventh chapter, the author justifies his selection of the acoustic modes of the two *Grama*-s as truly representing the *Grama*-s. He points out that the basic difference between the two *Grama*-s lies in the limma (92 cents) difference between their seventh notes and not in the comma (22 cents) difference between their sixth notes. The author then puts forward his notion of four basic *Grama*-s. The four basic scales suggested by him are: (1) *ma-grama*, positive perfect scale, (2) *sa-grama*, positive bi-centric scale, (3) *ga-grama*, negative form of the perfect scale, (4) *dha-grama*, negative form of the bi-centric scale.

In the eighth chapter, Prof. Lobo attacks the prevalent conception of perfect scales. All the features hitherto considered necessary for a perfect scale, namely, a series of perfect fifths and fourths, symmetry of tetrachords, the presence of di-tones (having two major tones in succession) are criticised. In this chapter the author also introduces the concept of isomodes, that is modes of the four *Grama*-s which begin on the same note, e.g. the *panchama murcchana*-s of the four *Grama*-s. The concluding chapter contains nothing new but is a reiteration of the ideas expressed in the earlier chapters.

The two monographs demand long hours of concentrated reading and are loaded with new technical terms such as bi-polarity, unicentricity, isomodes and negative scales. But more than the technicalities, the fundamental assumptions of the author are disquieting. As already pointed out, there are two main aspects to this work: the establishment of a perfect scale, and its identification with the *Madhyama Grama* of Bharata, the latter calling for a reinterpretation of Bharata. It is convenient to take up the second part of the work first.

In trying to find a historical counterpart for his perfect scale, the author comes upon the *Madhyama Grama* of Bharata, but, in the process of establishing its identity with his own basic scale, he launches into his own interpretation of Bharata. While he rejects the authority of post-Bharata theorists on the structure of the two *Grama*-s (pp. 72, 102, 107, 110), he himself does not cite any passage from the *Natyashastra* in support of his interpretation. The 'truth' of the 'true forms' of the *Grama*-s, discovered by the author, seems to lie in their conformity to his own notions, than to any statement of Bharata's. Moreover, the author's conception of the perfect scale and of the *Grama*-s seems to have undergone a change by the time we come to the end of the work. To begin with, he does not regard the perfect scale as a single linear arrangement of notes, but feels that it may "present itself in any of the seven diatonic modes possible, each mode beginning on a different note of the heptachord but retaining unchanged the circular sequence of the pre-determined diatonic intervals; the seven different modes are not different scales but only different modal shifts or top-tail inversions of the same immutable intervallic sequence of the Universal Basic Scale." (p. 23). Similarly, in the context of *Grama*, the author realises that "it is the specific sequence that makes the scale and not the specific mode" (p. 11; footnote 18). But in the course

of his work the author arrives at the conclusion that, "though any one of the seven modes of a fundamental diatonic scale or *Grama* can represent that scale, from which it derives, it is only its ACOUSTIC MODE that can be said to reveal truly the organized sonic origin and the acoustically superior character of that scale." (p. 102). Thus, starting with a cyclic system of modes representing the perfect scale, the author stations himself on a single mode, which alone is said to represent the true form of the scale. While the author is free to reach such conclusions, extending the same to the *Grama* system becomes difficult to accept, especially when he evolves the concept of an absolute *Grama* and declares that an absolute *Grama* "can be expressed only by its singular Acoustic Form and not by any of its other six modes, which have no Acoustic Form and no rational geometrical construction" (p. 102). This is not a legitimate extension of Bharata's notion of *Grama*. Nowhere does Bharata single out any one mode of a *Grama* and rank it higher than the others. In fact, reducing a *Grama* to one acoustic or authentic mode would undermine the concept of *Grama* itself. The cyclic system of *Grama* came to be supplanted by the linear system of *mela*-s by just such a process. The first mention of a *prakrita* (natural, or 'true' in Prof. Lobo's terminology) form of the *Grama*, which is distinguished from the remaining *vikrita* forms, is found in the *Abhinavabharati*. (see *Abhinavabharati* on *Natyashastra*, Vol. IV, p. 33, G.O.S. edn.). This view, attributed to Abhinava's teacher Utpaladeva, was later elaborated by Sharngadeva (*Sangitaratnakara*, 1, 3, 39-46, Adyar edn.). He considered the *svara* sequence of *Shadja Grama* alone, and, in particular, its *shadja-murcchana*, as the true form, and the *svara*-s belonging to it as *shuddha*, and the remaining *svara*-s as *vikrita*. In speaking of the absolute *Grama*, Prof. Lobo is committing the same error.

And in his effort to establish the true forms of the *Grama*-s, the author makes certain unwarranted assumptions. Much of the discussion in the two monographs is in terms of the note names C, D, etc., of Western music. C is equated with *ni* and the author adds that actually Bharata's *sa* is today's *ri* (!) and Bharata's *ni* is today's *sa* (p. 86). The author assures us that "this name shift does not in the least alter the original intervallic sequence of the *Grama*-s", but is it necessary at all? In view of the fact that it creates confusion in the minds of serious students of Bharata, and since the discussion almost never touches upon the *svara*-s of today, this shift could have been avoided. The author could have gone all the way and rechristened *Shadja Grama* as *Nishada Grama*, and *Madhyama Grama* as *Gandhara Grama*. The author then asserts that the tonic centre of *Shadja Grama* is *ma* (Bharata's *ma* and Prof. Lobo's *pa*) and declares that the mode starting from this *svara* is the true acoustic mode. Similarly he picks out the *nishada* (Bharata's *ni* and Dr. Lobo's *sa*) mode of the *Madhyama Grama* as its acoustic mode (p. 103). While the author insists that all the earlier scholars have failed to detect the true tonic of the two *Grama*-s described by Bharata, (p. 109), he himself never quotes the *Natyashastra* in support of his inferences.

In the entire work the author furnishes only one passage from the *Natyashastra* in translation, namely, in the context of the demonstration with the two *vina*-s. Here, too, the translation is not faithful to the text. He falls into the same error as most of the later scholars, in reading a type of *shruti* called *pramana-shruti* into the *Natyashastra*. The term *pramana-shruti* is an invention. Bharata only defines *shruti* as the *pramana* (measure) of the interval that is created by making

a sound appear higher or lower (than another) by loosening or tightening (the string of another sounding body).

एवं स्वश्रुत्युत्कर्षादपकर्षाद्वा यदन्तरं मर्दवादायनन्वाद्वा तन्प्रमाणं श्रुतिः

[*Natyashastra*, Vol. IV (G.O.S. edn.), Chapter 28. Prose passage after Verse 26.]

(Abhinavagupta's commentary confirms this). Nowhere does Bharata speak of a *pramana-shruti* or any other kind of *shruti*. For Bharata *shruti* is a unit of measure, as cent and savart are to Ellis and others. Talking of three values of a *shruti* (p. 97, 133) would be as absurd as talking of three values of an inch or a mile. Of course, unlike an inch, *shruti* was not a rigid unit, but Bharata (and later authors) intended this to be so, considering that he was dealing with the art of music, and not with experiments in acoustics. Anticipating some such objection, Dr. Lobo argues, "It is true that Bharata did not state that his twenty-two *shruti*-s were unequal, but he did not say that they were equal either" (p. 139). And so he would join those who look for different types of *shruti*-s. But the purpose of *shruti* was merely to help arrange the *svara*-s occurring in the *jati*-s in the two *Grama*-s (*Abhinavabharati* commentary on *Natyashastra*, Vol. IV (G.O.S. edn.) p. 42, lines 5-9; p. 24, line 4; p. 12, line 11). It is a perceptible difference in pitch by which the interval between *svara*-s can be determined (as being of four *shruti*-s, three *shruti*-s or two *shruti*-s). Being a perceptual unit, *shruti* was not exact; it was somewhat like a spoonful of sugar or 'one step'. To take an example, the *panchama* of *Shadja Grama* had an interval of four *shruti*-s from the *madhyama* and the *panchama* of *Madhyama Grama* had an interval of three *shruti*-s from its *madhyama*. But it is wrong to assume that the *panchama* of *Madhyama Grama* was stationed on the third *shruti* position of the four *shruti* interval of the *Shadja Gramic panchama*. The *Madhyama Gramic panchama* was known through acquaintance with the musical system in the same way as the *Shadja Gramic panchama*. *Shruti* was brought in only as a measure of this interval, and not vice versa. Otherwise *shruti* would not remain a measure, but would become identical with *svara*. In fact the problem has arisen in the modern period purely because of a confusion of *svara* with *shruti*. Bharata, at least, (this cannot be said of Dattila though), never regards the twenty-two *shruti*-s as an arrangement of pitch position in a register, wherein the seven *svara*-s are located on seven pitch positions. The intervals of the *svara*-s are more important than the *shruti*-s in terms of which they are measured. It is purely incidental that the number of *shruti*-s measuring the seven *svara*-s totals twenty-two. It is to illustrate the various intervals, of four, three and two *shruti*-s, which constitute the seven *svara*-s that Bharata includes the demonstration on the two *vina*-s.

Imposing the principles of acoustics on the ancient *shruti* system, Prof. Lobo takes the further liberty of equating frequency ratios and their logarithmic values with *shruti*-s. If, because of universal principles of consonance, it becomes possible to relate these ratios with some *svara* positions, it is purely incidental. This should not be carried too far. The finding of twenty-two values for the twenty-two *shruti*-s and the creation of twenty-two *svara* positions serves no purpose. As

stated earlier, the use of *shruti* to measure *svara* was purely for classification in the realm of theory. Finding equivalences for *shruti*-s in frequency ratios does not lead to any new knowledge about music. Pinning down a *svara* to a known frequency ratio only establishes a meeting point between a science (acoustics) and an art (music). It does not throw any light on the musical system. Bharata conceived of *shruti* as an audible difference in pitch between two sounds and left its discrimination to hearing. We can understand his system better if we stick to his terms and their connotations, leaving frequency ratios and their logarithmic conversions to the scientists.

Coming to the author's thesis of the perfect scale, the basic question that comes up is: why should there be a perfect scale at all? A scale is nothing but an arrangement of notes abstracted from a melody. Does the perfectness of the scale imply a perfection of the music? In other words, is that music alone good which is based on the perfect scale? The author seems to think so, on the whole, but he also says that other scales may serve 'artistic ends'. Here we have a puzzling conflict between good music and artistic ends. He rejects all the non-basic sequences stating that they are "irrational, even though they may serve artistic ends." (p. 21). Other statements express the same idea, "Some chromatic, enharmonic and arbitrary scales are artistic inventions of composers, while some other equally-tempered scales of 12, 7, 6 and 5 notes in the octave are artificial." (p. 21). "It is possible to play or sing an irrational scale by constant practice." (p. 21). Dr. Lobo, like Plato, has an a priori notion of perfectness and would turn a blind eye to the realities of art.

The rationale behind the acceptance of the author's perfect scale is unconvincing. The structure of the scale is as follows:

	204	182	112	204	182	204	112	
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	
1	9/8	5/4	4/3	3/2	5/3	15/8	2	

(The measure of the interval between notes is given in cents while the figures below the notes indicate the frequency ratios.) The important features of this scale, non-symmetry, unicentricity and the absence of di-tones, which are all interrelated, are considered its merits by the author. Symmetry, according to him, is non-fundamental (p. 118), and further, symmetry, whether of conjunct or disjunct tetrachords, 'kills the *grama*...' (p. 119). The reason given is: "When a tetrachord was joined, conjunctly or disjunctly, to another symmetrical tetrachord to form a heptachord or an octochord, the latter became a bi-centric scale representing two scales in one." That is to say one part of the scale would appear as a repetition of the other, instead of the whole seven-*svara* scale appearing as an individual entity. Two symmetrical tetrachords would create two tonic centres which is also not desirable, according to the author. Unicentricity prevents this. Indian thinkers have not been opposed to bi-centricity. In fact, in the entire pitch range of music, an octave has the same role as the tetrachord has in a bi-centric scale. The division of a register or *sthana* itself is on the basis of the two centres, tonic and its octave. The symmetry of octaves is the basic feature of a musical system, which reduces the number of *svara*-s to seven, and symmetry of tetrachords is but a reduction of that. Abhinavagupta reduces the

number of *svara*-s further to three, they being the four *shruti*-ed, three *shruti*-ed and two *shruti*-ed *svara*-s. Seven *svara*-s are obtained by placing one set of the three *svara*-s above the other, with *madhyama* in between. (*Abhinavabharati* on *Natyashastra*, Vol. IV, p. 14, lines 5-13.) Thus, a purely individualistic arrangement of *svara*-s, devoid of any symmetry, can be obtained only when we do away with the octave too. Prof. Lobo also seems to regard the di-tone, two major tones occurring in succession, as non-fundamental. Perhaps it is for this reason that he fixes the actual tonic of the *Shadja Grama* on *ma*. This way the successive major tones (four-*shruti* intervals) of *ma* and *pa* get separated. In this process, as mentioned earlier, the *Grama* gets reduced to one of its *murcchana*-s.

The derivation of the perfect scale and 'the fourfold rule' is interesting (p. 13). The first five harmonics, C, **C**, **G**, c, e, are taken. In these five notes, two consonances of C, C→G (perfect fifth) and C→e (major third) and two consonances of **G**, viz. **G**→c (perfect fourth) and **G**→e (major sixth) are taken. These four consonances (of which the third and sixth are not recognised by Bharata), which constitute 'the fourfold rule' are applied to both C and G, and the following notes C E, F G A, and G B C D E, are derived, to get the perfect scale C D E, F G A, B, c. The process described above seems to illustrate the relation of the notes to the principles of harmonics and consonance, rather than to establish a method of deriving scales. For the author does not explain why he stops with the fifth harmonic, or why he applied the fourfold rule to the tonic and dominate alone and not to the other notes. The reason for adopting this process, or for rejecting any other process, has not been convincingly presented. Mere statements such as "The belief that a good scale must have a series of perfect fifths or fourths has no acoustic or aesthetic basis," (p. 118), "Uncorrupted ears also sing natural unless corrupted by tempered or quintal *diatonies*" (p. 72) do not go to the depth of the problem. "Five harmonics and the four consonances" (p. 13) or "three quintals (notes occurring in the cycle of fifths) and three tertians (notes which are 22 cents lower than their corresponding quintals)" (p. 132), are features observed in the perfect scale rather than its logical building blocks.

While the author's enthusiastic championing of his perfect scale is laudable, the reasoning is purely mathematical and acoustic. The *Grama*-s are of secondary importance in his thesis, and need not have been accorded such a detailed treatment in the attempt to establish the validity of the perfect scale.

N. RAMANATHAN

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF INDIA by S. Bandyopadhyay, Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi, 1980, Rs. 40.00 (*In English*).

This book is a good addition to the few works on Indian musical instruments. S. Bandyopadhyay underwent training in vocal music and the sitar under the guidance of the late Dr. Ratanjankar. He is a teacher of long standing and is, therefore, well qualified to write on the subject of the musical instruments of India. The book has five chapters.

In Chapter One, the author outlines the evolution of music. Chapters Two to Five deal with descriptions of four types of musical instruments, namely, Aerophones, Chordophones, Membranophones and Autophones. The Glossary includes brief notes on Western and Indian instruments. After the Index and the Errata, right at the end, are forty-six illustrations.

Some of the author's statements in Chapter One need to be revised. He states that "*rsis* or *munis* have already confessed in the *Vedas*... that music is the gateway to heaven" (p. 5). This statement is rather vague. On page 7, he speaks of music "based on two rudiments known as metaphysical (spiritual) and the physical (substantial) forms." He adds that the latter was cultivated "by the heretics for their amusements" and further seems to indicate that this is *Deshi* music. His choice of the word 'heretics' is not a happy one. *Deshi* music was cultivated by heretics and also by people who believed in God. His statement (on page 10) that "the chanting of *Vedas* to the accompaniment of musical instruments of all types was prevalent in India even before 2400 B.C." is untenable. Vedic chanting was never accompanied by percussion instruments. He states (on pp. 11, 12) that the *Natyashastra* contains a chapter in which only orchestral music is described. We know that the *Natyashastra* has about four chapters dealing with instrumental music. He remarks (on page 12) that Matanga (in his work *Brihaddeshi*) treated the subject of wind-instruments in minute detail. Matanga's treatment of wind and other instruments has to be understood from the references to him in later musical treatises: the portion of the *Brihaddeshi* which deals with musical instruments is not available. He mentions four types of *Vadya* (on page 13) on the basis of the *Sangitaratnakara*. He has understood the word *Vadya* to mean a musical instrument, but it has to be understood in the sense of instrumental music.

The *Algoza* as described by him (on page 29) is not just one wind-instrument. *Algoza* in Rajasthan and Punjab is a pair of wind-instruments (flutes).

In Chapter Three, while describing the *Sarangi*, he says that the bow is moved vertically. Actually it is moved horizontally.

The author's description of *Nauvata* (in Chapter Four) is interesting but the absence of any description of instruments like the *Svaramandala*, *Kanun*, *Chenda*, *Edakka* indicates that his treatment of the subject is selective rather than exhaustive. An exhaustive and scholarly treatment of this subject is to be found in Dr. B. C. Deva's 'The Musical Instruments of India'.

The language of the book under review is defective in several places. Some errors of spelling and grammar occur on several pages.

A few errors have also crept into the Sanskrit quotations cited by him. For example *Tadroshtthi* on page 14 should be *Tadgoshthi*; *Madhurye* on page 30 should be *Madhuryam*. A rendering of some of the Sanskrit quotations into English would have been of help to the general reader.

The illustrations of musical instruments are quite good, and the author's emphasis on the need to study Sanskrit for a critical study of Indian music is quite justified. This book must be regarded only as a tentative beginning. It is hoped that serious students of music will be encouraged to embark on further investigation and research in the field of Indian musical instruments.

G. H. TARLEKAR

THE WAY-MUSIC (*How to conjure with sounds. Rudra Veena: The Theory and Technique of Tantric Music*) with a C-90 musicassette. By Thomas Marcotty. Decisio-Editrice, Lugano, Switzerland (Sole agents for India—Munshiram Manoharlal), 1980, Rs. 120.00 (*In English*).

Thomas Marcotty argues that playing the Veena is a secret science. This is an enigmatic statement unless he means that imparting the method of playing the Veena by gurus and teaching it to pupils is a secret art—a close preserve of great masters. The phenomenon, as such, is not universal. Instruments by themselves do not produce music. They are the means by which masters produce great music. Whether it is the Rudra Veena of Shiva or the Saraswati Veena of the South or the Sitar, the Violin, the Sarangi, the Nadaswaram or the Flute—they are dumb instruments. Once the genius of the man who plays it transforms the microtones, causes rhythmical patterns for *raga*-s and *swara*-s, divine music flows.

This book attempts to explain one aspect of Hindustani Music, namely, the music created by the Rudra Veena. There are very few practitioners of the art today. The process of learning itself is a prolonged, and arduous journey. It has, moreover, been practised as a part of the Tantric cult; the Veena itself is regarded as a *Yantra* and the music emanating from it is said to be a direct invocation to God.

The playing of the Rudra Veena is part of an esoteric cult, closely associated with occult practices though the music played conforms to traditionally recognised Hindustani Music. The author has tried to trace the Tantric roots of the playing of the Rudra Veena and in the process has written knowledgeably about Hindustani Music. His use of phrases like 'sound wave formation', 'microtones', 'rhythmical sound wave patterns' for *raga*-s and *swara*-s and *alap* sound strange to our ears but are possibly more intelligible to western readers for whom the book is intended. His laboured description of the creation of a proper atmosphere for the playing of a *raga* is in a similar vein.

The author has also done considerable research in the manufacture of the instrument and is familiar with the kind of wood, resin, paste, strings which go to make the instrument. His chapter on bending time is a thoughtful exposition of the loss of time-consciousness commonly experienced by Indians while creating or listening to music—not only that played on the Rudra Veena but other music as well. His comment in the last line about the association of Rudra Veena players with the demon is, however, quite unwarranted.

The book is beautifully illustrated with photographs and pictures of *yantra*-s. The author's exhaustive notes and bibliography enhance the value of the book. The reproductions from *Raga Chitra*, a palm-leaf manuscript of the early eighteenth century from Orissa, are very arresting. The accompanying cassette (where Side A has the *raga* Panchamkosh played by Ustad Ziauddin Dagar and Side B the *raga* Marwa played by Ustad Asad Ali Khan, with a concluding piece of the *raga* Todi by Pandit Asit Kumar Bannerjee) is an added attraction.

MUKUND GOSWAMI

PANDIT BHIMSEN JOSHI (Vocal): *Sangit Amrit*. Side One: *Raga* Sur Malhar. Side Two: *Raga* Marwa-Shree and *Raga* Marwa. Tabla: Nana Muley. EMI ECSD 2879 (Stereo).

PANDIT HARIPRASAD CHAURASIA (Flute): *Flute Fantasy*. Side One: *Raga* Hemavati. Side Two: *Raga* Des and *Dhun* in Bhatiali. Tabla: Shafaat Ahmed Khan. EMI ECSD 2884 (Stereo).

USTAD RAJAB ALI KHAN (Vocal): *Great Master Great Music*. Side One: *Raga* Jaunpuri. Side Two: *Raga* Bageshree. EMI ECLP 2618.

M. S. SUBBULAKSHMI (Vocal): *Sri Venkateswara (Balaji) Pancheratna Mala*. Sponsored by Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams. LPs 4 & 5. Songs and *Stotram*-s. Vocal Support: Radha Viswanathan. EMI ECSD 3316 & 3317 (Stereo).

The name of Bhimsen Joshi is today familiar even to the common man. The quality of his voice and his style of singing enjoy immense popular appeal. In this recording, his voice sounds particularly bright, bold and resilient. True enough, it has been assiduously cultivated by the musician but, in addition, one can see that modern recording techniques can go a long way in deepening tonal colour. Bhimsen Joshi is a recognised and innovative exponent of the Kirana *gharana*. He has contributed to it a regional flavour that is discernible in his *murki*-s and *khatka*-s which are characteristically Karnatic in expression.

In this recording, Bhimsen presents *Raga* Sur Malhar. His tunefulness, the clarity and polish of his open-throated *alap* and *tan*, his methodical progression, are all features we have come to expect of his music. He also renders his own creation, *Raga* Marwa-Shree. Although both Marwa and Shree have characteristics that mix well, in this particular fusion, the *raga*-s are not smoothly integrated. For instance, while singing *alap*-s up to *madhya dhaivata*, except when he occasionally sings the phrase *ma pa re*, it seems as if he is singing Marwa. Perhaps this is why the *drut* is not in Marwa-Shree, but in Marwa. The short *sargam* passage in the *vilambit* appears rather aimless. The *tarana* in Marwa has little impact and some of its faster passages are repetitive. The tabla support can hardly be heard, thus diminishing the overall impact of the artiste's play with rhythm.

Hariprasad Chaurasia's name automatically comes to mind when one thinks of the flute. His innate virtuosity is reflected in his perfect blowing technique, which he employs to produce rich uniform tones, a variety of expressions, from folk to classical, and even typical string-instrument effects such as *jhala*. His association with the film industry is reflected in the attention he pays to the polish and perfection of each note, phrase, movement and expression. Both his slow and fast passages are rendered with equal ease and dexterity.

On side One, Hariprasad Chaurasia plays a Karnatic *raga*, Hemavati, adapting it to the Hindustani style. His treatment reminds one of *Raga* Madhuvanti with only *komala nishada*. Hemavati has a *sampurna* scale, whereas Madhuvanti drops *rishabha* and *dhaivata* in the ascent. Since his treatment is closer to the latter, the scope of Hemavati's development has been restricted. *Raga* Des, on Side Two, is treated in the traditional manner. The piece which follows (in *Raga* Bhatiali) is the best. Some of its phrases and movements are incredibly poignant and evocative, and the rendering is enriched by a skilful use of folk expressions. In general, instrumental music allows a greater freedom to the percussionist. Unfortunately, the balance of the tabla against the flute is low in this recording and weakens the overall presentation.

Rajab Ali Khan's disc presents edited recordings from the archives of AIR. The recordings were made when the Ustad was over eighty and at a time when recording equipment was poor in quality. Thus, besides Rajab Ali's coughing, the recording has the scratchy disturbance of worn-out discs. Since only part of the original recording is given, one hears only a partial development of the *khyal*, and this leaves a sense of incompleteness. This record, therefore, will not have much of an appeal for the lay listener. But for the serious student or connoisseur, it is undoubtedly a prized item.

What strikes one first is the vigour, strength and range of Rajab Ali's voice, even at such an advanced age. In *Raga* Jaunpuri, he scales to *tara dhaivata* and in Bageshree descends to *mandra ma* with complete ease. In the upper octave, he reminds one of Abdul Karim Khan in terms of voice texture and expression. Conscious of his voice production, he can make a phrase aggressive or pleading, thunderous or tender. Thus, he is able to express an amazingly wide variety of feeling. He uses words carefully and with great effect in developing the *raga*, whether it is in *alap* or *tan*. He also makes excessive use of *boltan*-s and *tihai*-s.

In both Jaunpuri and Bageshree, the full text of the compositions appears to have been cut out in the editing. Studying the structure of the respective *raga*-s, as revealed through the compositions, would have been of invaluable help since compositions played an important role in preserving classical music. Jaunpuri, as it is sung today, uses only *komala dhaivata*, whereas Ustad Rajab Ali has also used *shuddha dha*, offering some beautiful phrases without disturbing the spirit of the *raga*. In Bageshree, too, he sings several unusual combinations using *panchama*. His *tan* patterns are rich in variety and rendering, especially on account of his rounded, heavy and clear *gamaka*-s. All this attests to the Ustad's imagination and *sadhana*. The sarangi player (who is not named) provides very good accompaniment. The tabla support, in Jaunpuri, is inaudible, whereas, in Bageshree, it is bold and bright. Tuned to *madhya sa*, it lends a pleasant and deep resonance to the recital.

Why has vocal music been given the highest place in Indian art? Perhaps because man has his instrument—the human voice—within himself. It is unlike any other instrument, for it can produce not only different tones, but also has the advantage of being able to articulate words, words with or without meaning. When man expresses music through words, the abstract becomes concrete.

Ideally, music and words should indentify with each other: music embraces words and words dissolve into music. This is what happens when Subbulakshmi sings.

Side One, of the fourth LP in the series, *Sri Venkateswara Pancharatna Mala*, opens with a pure and plain rendering of a *stotram*. By and large, it is very difficult for two singers to sing in perfect unison, without a rhythmic contour to define their pace and accentation. It is, therefore, remarkable that the curves, accentation, ornamentation and pauses of Subbulakshmi and Radha Viswanathan appear to come from one voice. Although the sleeve jacket says that Radha Viswanathan gives vocal support, it is, in fact, a duet performance since her support is continuous and prominent. When rhythm finally does enter in the last piece on 'Durga', it does so in a most unobtrusive manner, as if it was already part of the singing.

The second piece on Side Two is composed in the style of the Vedic chant and one experiences the austerity with which the Vedas were probably chanted in ancient times. The changes in pitch, from sa to ma to pa, as the text progresses, have been achieved smoothly and with perfect poise. The last hymn has influences of North Indian music. It does not match the other pieces, and, especially at the end, the beauty of tone is lost while singing *Hare Krishna* in the upper octave, where a climax was intended but has not been reached.

The fifth LP in the series is more classical in its treatment and expression of *Samkirtana*-s. Some pieces have elaborate *alap* openings, complex and fast movements, thematic variations, *sargam*, violin solos and percussion duets of the *midangam* and *ghattam*. Subbulakshmi's mastery over technique and her rich, aesthetic imagination are amply revealed here. One admires the ease with which she traverses two and a half octaves, without a break or change in tonal quality and beauty, as, for instance, when she descends to *kharja sa* in the first piece on Side Two. Even when she sings words in the upper octave, her tone remains rich and the words retain their clarity and feeling.

All the pieces have been sung with singular devotion and care, bringing each word to life. In general, classical music does not attract the layman, but presented the way Subbulakshmi sings in these records, it can reach practically anyone with a feeling for sound.

Since the notes on a record jacket play an important role in educating listeners, the information they contain should be relevant and precise. In Subbulakshmi's fourth LP, the great Annamacharya is said to have lived in the sixteenth century whereas, in the fifth LP, he is placed in the fifteenth century. Which of the two is correct? Every record jacket should mention the date of recording, the author of the notes, the name of the recording engineer, the accompanists etc. This is of historical value as documentation, and also acknowledges the efforts of the participants. Other details such as a *raga*-s mood, the time for its recital and *vadi-samvadi* need to be reviewed in the context of music as it is practised today. Far more useful than such information would be a description of the notes or scale of the *raga* and, wherever applicable, phrases and movements characteristic of the *raga*, and the full text of the compositions.

PRABHA ATRE

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Make-up and head-gear (*Mudiyettu*).

The cover-page depicts the process of preparation of the *kalam* (*Mudiyettu*).

